



# Wildlife Sound

The Journal of the Wildlife Sound Recording Society

Recording in Northern India

The Territorial Robin

Nagra VI Recorder



Volume 12 No 1 Spring 2011



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*Front cover: Robin - Erithacus rubecula - by Roger Boughton*

# Wildlife Sound Recording Society

Wildlife Sound Recording Society (WSRS) was formed in 1968.

The Society is based in the United Kingdom, but membership is spread throughout the world.

*"The objects of the Society shall be to encourage the enjoyment, recording and understanding of wildlife and other natural sounds. This will be achieved by circulating a sound magazine and a printed journal, by instigating and supporting projects which aim at furthering the science of bioacoustics, by developing the techniques of recording natural sounds and by any other means."*

WSRS holds an AGM & Members' Day each year, as well as regular local and field meetings at suitable venues, and also runs an annual sound recording competition.

## Officers for 2011

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# Editorial

As I write today, it's the middle of March and the first signs of spring are starting to reveal themselves. The blue tits are trying the nest box out for size again, while the general activity in the garden is on the increase. Living in the Midlands and fairly close to a main road means that conventional microphone recording at home is not particularly successful. Not to be put off, I enjoy photographing and watching the garden birds instead.

I hope that you have managed to get out for some recordings over the winter period. For me, trips have been mainly limited to days out with my local RSPB group, due to work and family commitments. Soon the migratory species will be back in Britain again, so I'm looking forward to a few mornings of Nightingale in Cambridgeshire when time permits.

I took two examples of said bird, recorded over twenty five years apart, to the local meeting organised by Roger and Bridget Charters back in February. Although the gear that I use has changed a fair amount since joining the Society back in the early eighties, the actual recording quality of the tracks has not vastly improved. What became apparent to me was the increase in background. The later recording has aircraft, bird scaring equipment, traffic and people - all everyday sounds that we get accustomed to. It's not until you set out to make a period television drama or record wildlife, that all these sounds become a problem.

Having just returned from a very successful WSRS field meeting in North Norfolk, I am reminded that one often has to travel away from their local patch, to escape much of the man-made noise that has become so intrusive over the years.

In this edition, John Neville tells us about recording in Newfoundland, where volcanoes and mountains are the order of the day. The weather, he says, is "challenging, not unlike Northern Scotland!"

Onto warmer climes, Gerard Grant's enjoyed a cycling holiday in the French national park of La Brenne, with some sound recording thrown in. Tony Baylis has been experiencing unusually wet weather in Queensland, Black Bitterns seem to like it though!

Gordon Edgar went on a trip to Northern India with Wildeye last year. His report highlights some of the problems that recordists may face when going abroad with recording equipment and batteries. Airport security issues pale into insignificance though, compared to tigers and termites!

Elephants, car crashes and malaria are on the agenda, when David Tombs provides us with a follow up to his Spring 2004 Journal article about recording in Madagascar and Kenya.

You may feel that garden insects offer less hazardous recording opportunities than big cats!

Al Milano provides an insight into recording insects on a budget. This is a timely follow-up to the Ultrasonic recording articles in the last spring Journal.

For an investigation into the garden pond, the Society has a couple of hydrophones which may be loaned out to members. Contact Roger Boughton for further details.

One of the birds that continues to amaze me is the Robin. The ubiquitous bird that portrays the image of a white Christmas on so many cards has a fascinating and aggressive life. Philip Radford tells us about this robust little songster, which has been occasionally mistaken for the Nightingale.

With equipment reviews, meeting reports and Society news topping off this edition of Wildlife Sound, I hope it has something of interest to everyone. Once again, thanks to all the many contributors who make this Journal a pleasure to compile.

Andy

## Soundings

### Geoff Sample

OK, picture this. There's a sound recordist that has a bit of a crush on long-eared owls. They are so elusive, beautiful and very subtle in their vocalisation. Not having located any displaying birds in the last two years he goes out mid Feb, to listen in some likely local sites. Sure enough on the first night a pair are displaying on the edge of a wood near a previously occupied site. The next night he goes out with kit, more as reconnaissance recording, since it's a little breezy, trying to home in on where the male is singing from, since it tends to be pretty dark and one cannot very easily establish the location with a physical approach without disturbing the bird.

Three days later the wind has died and it's a gorgeous calm, clear evening, with a hint of spring. The recordist sets up his mics an hour before dusk then runs a cable back 100m to a suitable spot and lays out some screening pine branches.



It's just on the darker side of dusk, when I catch a winged shadow drifting up close; it hovers over the screening branches at my feet for a second, then retreats to a branch a few metres away peering down at me for a minute or so. I can only see it silhouetted in the dusk and wonder if it's a tawny. But subsequent events reveal it's the male long-eared. He goes off, meets up with his female (I hear), then about ten minutes later appears near me again. Finally goes up to a branch above me and after a minute, begins his soft hooting song (mics unfortunately 100m off!). An absolutely beautiful experience – on a calm moonlit night in the wood.

Life feels good, as it appears I'm accepted as an unthreatening part of the scene. Either that or he was unaware of me, which I find hard to believe. Later he went along and sang almost continuously for an hour probably about 10m in front of the mics. But it's still such a quiet recording.

I love doing wildlife sound because it brings me close to my animal soul. Yet these close encounters transcend even a good recording. And I'm beginning to think you can't really capture it. After all you can get super-close shots/sounds from wildlife parks, or be shown a hotspot by a reserve warden or a guide.

So there's only that experience of intimacy.

A few points on submissions:

1 Sometimes I've been receiving rather long pieces and the member leaves it to me to choose a section. As well as being time-consuming to go through the piece properly, I may well choose a less interesting section, since I'm not fully aware of the circumstances, context and may know very little of the subject. I'd prefer it if you choose more or less the section to use.

2 I'm receiving submissions on a variety of formats: reel-to-reel, mini disc, audio CD and audio files, either on data CD or via web storage services. For the purposes of the SM being published on audio CD, this involves converting to 44.1 / 16bit.

This gives me something of a dilemma. In the case where the file sent in has a higher sample-rate or higher resolution bit-rate, do I archive the original file or the converted file? Should I standardise the archive at 44.1k / 16bit? If anyone has thoughts on this, please let me know. Have a good spring.

**Geoff**

## From the Chairman

May I take this opportunity to welcome all those new members that are now experiencing the superb Wildlife Sound Recording Society's publications for the first time. The Journals contain many erudite articles that give members the insight of how others go about this wonderful pastime of ours, and what one can do with the resultant recordings.

During the last year we have had our Spring meeting in Cumbria, our Members' Day in Rutland and our Winter/Spring meeting in Norfolk. Later this year, on July 9th, we have our Members Day 2011 at Minsterworth in Gloucestershire. We continue to move the Members' Day to different places around the British Isles, to enable as many members as possible to come to this important event in our calendar. So please make an effort and come and meet other members at Minsterworth.

At this event I will be handing over the Chairmanship to another. To be absolutely honest, I am looking forward to being an ordinary member again, leaving the planning and organising to others. This will enable me to concentrate on some of those recording projects I need to get stuck into.

During my terms as Membership Secretary, Vice Chairman, Webmaster and Chairman, I have seen the WSRS move from a very low ebb, to a society that is continually moving forward with new ideas and the re-invention and modernising of old ones. Encouraging new members to join, and old members to continue their good work and do even more than they did before. For the Society to continue this improvement it needs you, the members, to help. It is necessary for as many of you as possible to support the Officers initiatives in any way you can.



Providing pieces for the Sound Editor, articles for the Journal or taking part in the web-site forum or blog. Why not enter the competition? The tremendous prizes awaiting the winners might just encourage you. The good news for the 2011 competition is that I can confirm that Sound Network will again sponsor the Silver Fox award with £1000 prize of DPA microphones. I have also obtained sponsorship from Nagra (UK) who has given us a Nagra Ares ML complete with stereo microphone for the winner of the best in the Reserve classes.



I have also been given, by Nagra, a second hand Nagra P2 for use by any member who would like to experience using a top quality recording machine.

Well, that's my lot. I wish you well and may all your recording efforts be fruitful. I have enjoyed my term as an Officer in the Society. It has been frustrating at times but overall it has been great to see the Society improve and grow. Long may it continue.

Regards  
Roger Boughton

#### **Editor's Note:**

On behalf of the Society, I would just like to say a big "Thank you" to Roger for his many years on the Society's committee.

Steering a group with so many diverse personalities, interests and abilities is not an easy job in anyone's book, but Roger has shown a great level of commitment and care for the Society's development and future.

## **Woodpecker Population Changes**

### **Philip Radford**

Great Spotted Woodpeckers *Dendrocopos major*, at least in Somerset, appear to have increased in numbers in recent years, judging by the amount of drumming I hear through the year. Green Woodpeckers *Picus viridis* are certainly in reasonable numbers in the Quantock area but, sadly, Lesser Spotted Woodpeckers *D minor* have declined considerably. Further, Wrynecks *Jynx torquilla* are now almost extinct as British breeding birds.

I was interested to read, therefore, that the Victorian ornithologist William Hewitson (1846; Eggs of British Birds; London) considered Great Spotted Woodpeckers to be rare birds:

*"It has very rarely been my lot to see it alive, and I have eagerly looked for it in places where the green woodpecker and wryneck are very abundant."*

Would that Wrynecks were abundant in Britain nowadays! Even so, probably most of us would find it difficult to think of Great Spotted Woodpeckers as rarities at the present time. I understand that Hewitson had ample opportunities of observing British Birds as he was employed in carrying out railway surveys; of course, that was some 160 years back, which can make a lot of difference where birds are concerned.

Perhaps incidentally, when writing on the Lesser Spotted Woodpecker, Hewitson made no comment on its numbers although I think he would have done so had he considered it a rarity. These days, I know of sound recordists who have plenty of good sequences of Great Spotted Woodpecker drumming and are still waiting for an opportunity of getting the longer drum bouts of the Lesser Spotted Woodpecker. I trust they will not have to wait in vain.

## **Acting Secretary's Report**

### **Paul Pratley**

It has been nearly six months since I took over as acting Hon Secretary. It has been a bit of a steep learning curve, things have not always gone to plan, but I hope in general things have worked.

We have seen one of the coldest winters for many years. At its height I was filling up my 3 bird feeders every day with sunflower seeds. This seemed to have kept the local population of Tits, Chaffinches and a half dozen Bullfinches happy. I even managed to attract a Brambling, not a common visitor here in the South West.

It will be interesting to see how some of the vulnerable species have done. I've seen and heard several Treecreepers, but last year Dartford Warblers were difficult to find, so let's hope they have fared better this year.

The Society's web-site keeps going from strength to strength. We receive many visits from all around the world and it is one of the leading sites on wildlife sound recording. I do urge every member to try and have a look at it. If you don't have Internet facilities yourself, most public libraries offer free Internet access for a limited period, around 30 minutes per session. There is usually someone on hand to assist you if you get stuck. We hope to be able to have access to the web-site at the AGM in July, where experienced members will be on hand if you need help.

We have also noticed a drop in the number of newsletters that are being read, now that it's being sent out by email. I do urge you to click the link at the bottom of the email that links to the full newsletter. The newsletter is one of the most important routes to get information, news and requests out to the membership.

We are planning some more field visits. As I write this we are a week away from our winter/spring meeting in Norfolk. Let's hope that it's drier than last year. In early December 2011 we have booked the farm house at Caerlaverock WWT on the Solway Firth; a return visit to this popular venue for the wintering wildfowl especially the Barnacle Geese. In May 2012 we are planning a week long visit to Islay on the West coast of Scotland, the home of Choughs and Corncrakes. Spaces on these trips are limited, so please let me know if you are interested and watch out for the booking forms in the next newsletter and on the web-site.

The Members' Day and AGM this year will be held at Minsterworth Village Hall on Saturday July 9th, so please make a note in your diary. Minsterworth village is located just off the M5 close to Gloucester. This is a good location as it affords good access from the South via the M5 and M4, and from the North via the M1, M6 and M5.

We will be sending out full details of the AGM nearer the time. I look forward to meeting many of you at the Members' Day and AGM in July.

**Paul**

# ABSTRACTS

Interesting articles from recent  
bioacoustics literature

Compiled by Simon Elliott

**Habitat-related birdsong divergence: a multi-level study on the influence of territory density and ambient noise in European blackbirds.**

Ripmeester EAP, Kok JS, van Rijssel JC, Slabbekoorn H. *Behav. Ecol. Sociobiol.* 64(3):409-418.2009

Habitat-related variation between populations can reflect adaptations to the environment accumulated over generations. The authors tested whether variation between individuals matches local conditions with respect to noise level and territory density to examine whether short-term flexibility could contribute to song divergence at the population level. They conducted a case study on an urban and forest population of the European blackbird and showed divergence at the population level (i.e. across habitats) in blackbird song, anthropogenic noise level and territory density.

They found a lack of any correlation at the individual level (i.e. across individuals) between song features and ambient noise. This suggests species-specific causal explanations for noise-dependent song differentiation which are likely associated with variation in song-copying behaviour or feedback constraints related to variable singing styles. On the other hand, they found that at the level of individual territories, temporal features, but not spectral ones, are correlated to territory density and seasonality. This suggests that short-term individual variation can indeed contribute to habitat-dependent divergence at the population level.

They conclude that more investigations on individual song flexibility are required for a better understanding of the impact of population-level song divergence on hybridisation and speciation.

**Wild bird feeding delays start of dawn singing in the great tit**

Saggese K, Korner-Nievergelt F, Slagsvold T, Amrhein V. *Animal Behaviour*. doi:10.1016/j.anbehav.2010.11.008

Supplementary feeding of wild birds during winter is one of the most popular wildlife activities, and is likely to have profound influence on the behavioural ecology of a species. At garden bird feeders, birds are now often fed well into the breeding season. Providing food within an established songbird territory, however, is likely to influence the territorial behaviour of the resident male. The authors used song performance during the dawn chorus in early spring to study behavioural changes in food-supplemented Great tits *Parus major*. After 2 weeks of continuous food supply within their territory, supplemented males started dawn singing later than control males, and thus postponed their regular dawn chorus before sunrise. This effect was maintained 2 weeks after food supplementation had ended. They did not find an effect of long-term feeding on song output. The reasons for the delay in the

start of dawn singing remain unclear; possible explanations include the presence of predators at feeding stations and the quality of the supplementary food itself. Delaying dawn singing could potentially affect the reproductive success of supplemented males, for example if females base extra-pair mating decisions on dawn song performance of their mates.

**Bats aloft: variability in echolocation call structure at high altitudes.**

Gillam EH, McCracken GF, Westbrook JK, Lee Y-F, Jensen ML, Balsley BB. *Behav. Ecol. Sociobiol.* 64(1):69-79.2009

Little is known about how bats adjust call structure in response to changes in altitude. The researchers examined altitudinal variation in the echolocation of Brazilian free-tailed bats *Tadarida brasiliensis*, a species known to fly to altitudes of 3000m above the ground. From over 50 hours of recordings, they analysed echolocation call sequences recorded from 0m to 862m above ground level.

Bats flying near the ground used shorter, higher-frequency, broader-bandwidth calls compared to bats at higher altitudes, an effect likely due to the greater levels of echo-producing clutter (vegetation, buildings) found near the ground. When ground-level recordings are excluded, bats continue to shift towards the use of longer-duration, lower-frequency, narrower-bandwidth calls with increasing altitude. They propose that the observed high-altitude changes in call structure are a response to changing acoustic attenuation rates and/or decreasing insect densities at higher altitudes.

**Visual and acoustic surveys for North Atlantic right whales, *Eubalaena glacialis*, in Cape Cod Bay, Massachusetts, 2001–2005: Management implications**

Clark CW, Brown MW, Corkeron P. *Marine Mammal Science*. 26(4):837-854. 2010

North Atlantic right whales *Eubalaena glacialis* are an endangered species. Current management protocols in US waters are triggered by identifying the presence of at least one right whale in a management area. The researchers assessed whether acoustic detection of right whale contact calls can work as an alternative to visual aerial surveys for establishing their presence.

Over 58 days, with simultaneous aerial and acoustic coverage, aerial surveys saw whales on approximately two-thirds of the days during which acoustic monitoring heard whales. There was no strong relationship between numbers of whales seen during aerial surveys and numbers of contact calls detected on survey days. Results indicate acoustic monitoring is a more reliable mechanism than aerial survey for detecting right whales. Because simple detection is sufficient to trigger current management protocols, continuous, autonomous acoustic monitoring provides information of immediate management utility more reliably than aerial surveillance.

Aerial surveys are still required to provide data for estimating population parameters and for visually assessing the frequency and severity of injuries from shipping and fishing and detecting injured and entangled right whales

### Common Loons can differentiate yodels of neighbouring and non-neighbouring conspecifics

Mager JN, Walcott C, Piper WH. J. Field Ornithology 81(4):392-401.2010

No one to date has determined whether Common Loons *Gavia immer* (Great Northern Diver) can distinguish between the yodels of neighbours and non-neighbours. The objectives were to determine if Common Loons respond differently to playback recordings of yodels of neighbours and non-neighbours and, if so, if elements of the introductory phrase or the repeat phrases are important in such differentiation.

They studied loons occupying single-lake territories in Oneida County, Wisconsin, USA. Playback experiments revealed no significant difference in number of different types of vocalizations (yodels, tremolos, and wails) loons gave in response to neighbour and non-neighbour yodels. However, loons gave significantly more tremolos in response to yodels lower in peak frequency than those of resident male indicating they were more threatened by such calls. In addition, loons gave significantly more tremolos and yodels in response to the lower frequency yodels of non-neighbours than neighbours.

Because previous studies have revealed that males with greater resource-holding ability produce lower frequency yodels, the results suggest that the response of Common Loons to unfamiliar yodels depends on perceived condition-dependent fighting ability. When they used playbacks containing a non-neighbour's introductory phrase and a neighbour's repeat syllables, they found that loons uttered more tremolos and yodels, suggesting that the introductory phrase is more important than the repeat phrases for neighbour/non-neighbour discrimination. Thus, the yodels of male Common Loons appear to provide conspecifics with information about their status (neighbour or non-neighbour) as well as their condition and aggressive motivation.

### Sex Differences in the Song of Indri indri

Giacoma C, Sorrentino V, Rabarivola C and Gamba M. Int. J. Primatol. 30(4):539-551.2010

The authors investigated sex differences in the song of the lemur *Indri indri*. In some primate species, males and females within a social group emit loud calls in a coordinated chorus. *Indri* emit a very conspicuous loud call that elicits the loud calls of neighbouring groups. It has been hypothesised that the main functions of the *indri* chorus are related to territorial announcement, inter-group avoidance, and group cohesion.

An analysis of songs given by 10 different groups over 160 days revealed that overall singing duration did not vary between the sexes. However, males emitted significantly fewer but longer notes. Adult males and females of each group participated in the song with sex-specific repertoires. Females had a song repertoire of 8 note types; males shared all of their 6 notes with females. Apart from the initial roars, in all note types shared by both sexes, male notes were significantly longer than female ones, whereas variations in frequency parameters differed according to the note type.

These findings suggest that *indri* song may provide cues to conspecifics, such as group size and sex composition, which could influence interactions between groups

### Hydrophone bait

posted on <http://www.mail-archive.com/bioacoustics-1@cornell.edu/> Sep 2010 by biologist Mario Rivera-Chavarria (who has kindly given me permission to quote from his replies).

*"Hi everybody*

*Yesterday a Shark (a bull) ate my Hydrophone around Murcielago island. In despite of my financial loss, this is pretty interesting. Have any of you have similar experiences with hydrophones or any other electronic equipment?"*

He received dozens of responses to his post, all with valuable suggestions.

*"First of all, just to note that shark attacks to electronic equipment are common and frequent. In summary, here are some suggestions for marine bioacousticians that work with hydrophones (and actually is valid for any other electronic equipment) within shark's habitat:*

- *Try to use heavy duty cable.*
- *Tow in greater speeds.*
- *Avoid to work near (less than 3Nmi) of tuna or shrimp boats.*
- *Design the electronics to minimize the radiated electric and magnetic fields.*
- *Make cages with metal sieve (but I don't know if this can affect the caption)*
- *Use twisted pair cables and differential signal drive.*
- *Shield the preamplifier.*
- *Hide shiny components.*

*Carry a rabbit's foot."*

=====

## Reed Bunting Song, a Victorian Description

### Philip Radford

The Reverend. F. O. Morris, in volume 2 of his "A History of British Birds" (1852; London), has this account of the song of the Reed Bunting *Emberiza schoeniclus*:

*"The note is rendered by Meyer by the word 'sherrip' pronounced quickly; a mere chirp of two notes, the first repeated three or four times, the last single and more sharp. It is heard at tolerably frequent intervals..."*

Surely this is not a bad description for a Victorian ornithologist, although maybe rather simplified.

Of course, it must be remembered that Reed Bunting song changes its character when the male has mated.



# The Territorial Robin

**Philip Radford**

Few people in Britain will fail to identify a European Robin *Erithacus rubecula* correctly. The small brown bird, classed as a chat, with an upright stance, relatively long thin legs, an orange-red breast and a hopping gait is familiar in most gardens, parks and woodland, provided that there is plenty of undergrowth.

Lack (1943) was perhaps the first ornithologist to draw attention to the fact that Robin display is common, particularly in the early morning, and also to point out that it is a threat and never courtship. A displaying Robin is trying to intimidate an intruder and, maybe, it couples it with a loud burst of song. Should the intruder be a desired female (also with a red breast) and at the correct season, then somehow she must react in a different way to a trespassing cock.

The orange-red of the Robin's breast is crucial for the species and is acquired in the late summer or the early autumn, following a juvenile's first moult. In the course of the threat display, the red breast is puffed out, the body is swayed, the head is raised and the tail is cocked, so exhibiting the maximum amount of red feathering. Often the wings are flicked as well and, frequently, a rival will just slink off; otherwise, a fight will ensue. In consequence, Robins normally keep to their own territories, both for feeding and for nesting; Robins are jealous of their territorial boundaries and the male will only permit its chosen mate to roam freely; even the female will be attacked by neighbouring Robins should she stray over her boundaries.



Robins know their own territorial boundaries but their limits, and how they are determined, is usually a mystery to most people. Just occasionally, an unusually timid Robin will get frustrated if a rival does not retreat and, instead of fighting, will engage in displacement activity, such as ground-pecking. Territorial Robins will attack anything red, including a bunch of the bird's breast feathers or, more understandably, a planted stuffed Robin or, occasionally, strange red objects. I have watched transient display before a red, dying ember of a bonfire, the red handle of a new wheelbarrow and, once, a ripe red garden tomato! Male Robins, normally so aggressive, can be very attentive to their mates, at least when nesting.

Courtship feeding of the female by the male is normal, but is confined to the breeding season. Territorial guarding is relaxed during severe weather conditions when food is difficult to secure; with ice or snow cover several Robins can be watched near a food source, as in a garden. Sometimes, when birds are fighting and chasing for food scraps, an individual Robin will show unusual behaviour (Radford; 2009): one snowy February day I saw a Robin start to burrow obliquely into soft snow by head-first buffeting to get at some buried oat-flakes in my garden; at times it was quite lost to view. Other Robins were about in the area, but only one individual snow-burrowed.

Of course, Robins are garden favourites and hence Christmas card celebrities; they are conspicuous outside the breeding and moulting periods and many stay with us all the year round. Notably, Robins attend the gardener when the soil is dug and people complain if there is no Robin about to seize an exposed wireworm or centipede. However, some Robins do migrate, as proved by ringing; some birds of the year move to continental Europe or Ireland in autumn. Also in autumn, winter visitors arrive in Britain from Eastern Europe or Scandinavia; these Robins do not appear to be as tame as the more sedentary British ones and are more likely to disperse to woodland.

Even so, Robins are essentially woodland birds, particularly those in central and eastern Europe, where they are far less tame than British residents. Turning to natural food, I am always fascinated when I see a Robin tugging an earthworm, sometimes a surprisingly long one too, from the ground. As well as earthworms, almost any other soil invertebrate will do if it can be secured; spiders, earwigs and beetles are largely favoured. Vegetable items are taken at times, including various small seeds or fruits such as blackcurrants, raspberries or haws.

Curiously, Robins have been observed seizing small fish, or fish fry, from shallow water; a highly original sound-recording, of mechanical nature, could be that of a Robin feeding by plunging into water for its prey, always providing that the background was sufficiently quiet!

Further, as well as following the gardener, a Robin will sometimes accompany a Mole, *Talpa europaea*, as it digs an earth tunnel, although I expect this would have to be a daylight or twilight dig.

Naturally, Robins have their enemies and the biggest threat must be the domestic cat, which often kills without eating its prey. Doubtless, Sparrowhawks, *Accipiter nisus*, take their share of Robins, as will other hawks or falcons, while Tawny Owls *Strix aluco* may well seize one at its roosting site. Like most small birds in Britain, they were sometimes snared or netted to be eaten by people and the red feathers, at one time, were in demand for use as dress or hat ornaments.

Robins are inquisitive birds so they can be killed in badly-positioned spring mouse-traps set in the garden, although traps of this type are not readily available these days. Garden feeding has its dangers and Robins, with their relatively large eyes, have the ability to feed in dim lighting conditions; dawn or dusk in garden and woodland glade often shows an investigating, beady-eyed Robin. Then I think that most of us would agree that the last bird to emerge from the garden bird-bath is the Robin, maybe on a winter evening as ice is just beginning to form. In the morning, even pre-dawn, a Robin will often flit around one's feet, I suppose anticipating some disturbed food item; after all, the birds are mainly ground feeders.

So often, in daytime, we see our vigilant Robin surveying the ground from one of its many vantage points; little is missed if there is a meal in the offing. The female Robin is very wary as she builds her nest. Only the hen builds and sits on the eggs; still, the male does show some consideration and will carry food to his mate in courtship feeding. Robins nest from March to early summer, often raising two broods and, just occasionally, three. Common nest sites are hollows in banks or walls, tree trunk recesses and, at times, strange positions such as discarded tin cans or old kettles; another favourite is a ledge inside a garden shed. In woodland, the bird commonly nests on the ground, perhaps with a grassy approach tunnel or under a mat of dead bracken; nests of this type can be very difficult to locate. Dead leaves are used as a nest foundation, with moss pieces and dried grasses above and a neat lining of rootlets, hairs and feathers. Nowadays, it is not uncommon to find the odd bit of paper or plastic material mixed in as well.

Four or five eggs are laid, with a whitish ground and red-brown flecks or mottlings. Both sexes feed the young; they are very difficult to watch if there are people about so a hide is necessary if you want some action photographs. I expect that most of us enjoy listening to the song of the Robin, and often that is possible almost throughout the year. Even so, the song detail is difficult to describe but a valiant attempt was made by a French researcher J. Bremond (1968). Bremond showed that the song is made up of different musical phrases in varying combinations. A phrase lasts about one second and consists of alternate high and low pitched notes; four phrases are normally combined to make up one song and, as several hundred different phrases are possible, song variation is potentially enormous.

Continuing his research, Bremond carried out a series of song playback experiments, based on experience with normal Robin song and, also, using synthesised song prepared using an electronic sound generator. It was found that song composed of high phrases only gave no



response on playback, and it was the same with a low phrased song; however, when a normal type of song was approached by making use of alternate high and low frequency phrases, then Robin playback response was similar to that of normal recorded song. Clearly, the essential song recognition for the Robin is that of phrase pitch alternation.

There are those who maintain that really good Robin song can compare favourably with that of the Nightingale *Luscinia megarhynchos*. Some Robin song has a melancholic quality but is both musical and melodious; as always, so much depends on the individual bird and also the habitat and location. When recording, I have found that it is very easy to over-modulate the song in one's enthusiasm for sufficient amplitude in the sequence; still, there is such variation between individual Robin songs that one cannot have too many in one's sound library.

The Robin is one of the few birds to sing in autumn and, of course, females, or at least a high proportion of them, give song as well as the males and also hold territory. The true territory-holding male Robin's song starts late in December and continues to midsummer; then, after a gap, autumn song begins in September or October. Young birds of the year sometimes sing in July and so do some territory-holding males; Lack (1943) stated that once, on 13th July, he heard a juvenile in song while a late adult was singing its springtime song. A male's territorial song has the function of proclaiming territorial boundaries and of enticing interested females to come closer; in addition, after mating, the song helps in pair bonding as well as deterring rival males. It is said that as soon as a male Robin has obtained a mate, perhaps in January, then its song output declines to some extent, but will increase again if the mate deserts him or gets killed. With some species, mating causes song to cease, as with the rather extreme case of the Sedge Warbler *Acrocephalus schoenobaenus*; but it should be remembered that this species is a migrant and summer visitor.

It appears that male song birds sing in response to an increased concentration of the male sex hormone, testosterone, in the blood. In this connection, I understand



that the blood of female Robins has been shown to have an increased amount of testosterone in autumn; as with all animal species, so much depends on hormone production and, obviously, the proper functioning of the endocrine glands. Robins readily sing in the dark if disturbed by a thunder clap or other loud noise; further, the presence of street lighting will also stimulate Robins into night song. I recall being telephoned by a keen young bird-watcher in Bristol, saying that he thought that a Nightingale was singing in his suburban garden at night; he had taken a tape-recording, which he played back to me. Sadly, the bird was a Robin, singing in a well-lit town area.

Often, the Robin with a really vigorous winter or spring song is still trying to attract a mate; moreover, there is usually an increase in song intensity soon after the young have left the nest. Young Robins must learn the song of a parent, presumably the male; as far as I know, Robin chicks reared in acoustic isolation do not achieve fully developed song. On occasions, Robin song may contain hints of imitation, especially for the notes of Great Tit, *Parus major*, or of Chaffinch, *Fringilla coelebs*; nevertheless, where song shows variation, it is easy to suggest mimicry when none is really present.

In the past, Robins, I expect males, were often kept as cage birds and their owners loved to boast of their ability for imitation which, I suspect, was often wishful thinking. Anyway, in the wild, Robin song is often one of the first to be heard in the woodland dawn chorus, together with the Blackbird, *Turdus merula* and the Song Thrush, *T. philomelos*; furthermore, as dusk advances, the Robin is normally one of the last birds to be heard in song, and overlapping with early hoots of Tawny Owls. Robins, with

their relatively large eyes, rise early and retire late; in our gardens, a Robin is usually the last bird to leave the bird-bath.

I expect that most of us get a sense of achievement on getting a high-quality Robin song recording, whatever the time of the year. Then there is surely interest in attempting to label autumn song as male or female, something I find very difficult, and in trying to record sub-song.

Obviously, we should not forget that Robin call notes are worth recording too; probably the repeated 'tic' call is the best known. These 'tic' calls are characteristic of woodland clearings and can be uttered in alarm or prior to roosting, when they may be associated with Blackbird retiring calls.

Other Robin calls are high-frequency 'tsee' notes, with many variations, and which may well remain unheard by elderly people, but they are quickly reacted to by other small birds. One of these calls, very difficult to localise, is given if a Sparrow hawk or other bird-of-prey has been sighted and birds in general will flee into cover; now, that would make a sound-picture really worth recording.

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*Robin photographs by Roger Boughton*

## Letters to the Editor

Dear Sir,

I have just paid next year's subs using Paypal. This is a quick and easy way of doing it, and I'm sure members will welcome being able to do likewise.

I have also been able to get in at the old rate, which I'm sure those with the organisational ability will be pleased to take advantage of.

While the modest increase is to be expected it did occur to me that since a good deal of the subscription goes on the SM and the Journal they should be the first things we look at when trying to keep subs down.

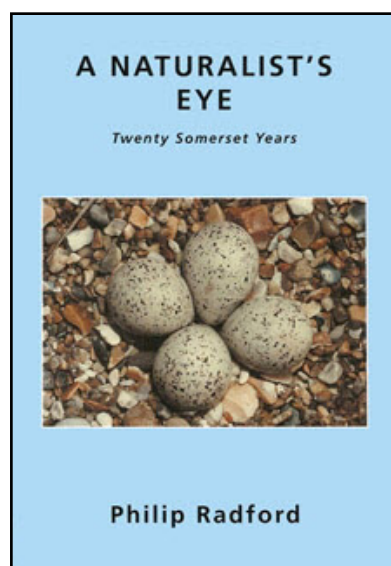
It is possible to download a PDF version of the Journal at the moment. With fast download times it should also be possible to get the SM the same way. If members then opted out of having the printed and CD versions of the Journal and SM, they could be offered a significant reduction in subs.

Phil Riddett

Heather Myers has written to me, expressing her delight in a publication she had recently read.

The book is called:

**"A Naturalist's Eye-Twenty Somerset Years"** and written by our very own Philip Radford.



Published in 2008 through the Somerset Archaeological and Natural History Society, it describes Philip's time in the Somerset countryside.

Philip is a man of many talents, as well as a wordsmith, this book is illustrated with many of his own photographs. I Hope to review a copy for the next Journal.

In the meantime, here is a bit more information:

<http://www.sanhs.org/Naturalist%27sEye.htm>

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## The Cassette Album of British Bird Vocabulary by Victor Lewis

### A very personal appreciation by Tim Newton

You cannot really review something which came out in 1979, so I'm not sure how to start this brief article, but I want to share a discovery I've made with fellow members of the WSRs – particularly those who weren't actively involved with wildlife sound recording back in the late 70s.

It all began with a visit to a second-hand bookshop at the beginning of September. Nothing unusual in this, indeed those of you who endured (sorry – enjoyed), my write up of the Members' Day at Cottesmore will recall that I have a weakness for older natural history books, and generally feel obliged to rescue any I see languishing on dealers' shelves – feeling that they were written to be used by enthusiasts, preferably in the field, not to gather dust, unloved, on dark shelves.

I was about to leave this shop when I spotted the spine of what appeared to be a hard back tome on the top shelf, (there's an unfortunate admission in itself!), bearing the inscription on the spine, "British Bird Vocabulary Volume Five". When I got it down, it was a sort of box package, styled to look like a book, containing 2 audio cassettes and a short text, on Heathland, Mountain and Moorland birds, for the princely sum of a fiver.

There's no need to ask if I made the purchase, but that first evening I did have some misgivings as the tapes refused to play – memories of my youth, trying to play sticking cassettes and hearing the speech or songs distort as the tape jammed repeatedly.

I wasn't going to give up though, because the handbook promised the sounds of 25 species, depicted in 121 examples from these two cassettes with a combined running time of some 90 minutes – that was just too good to pass up. Eventually the tapes freed up enough to play through, enabling me to re-record them immediately, just in case something snapped!

After one complete play through I was smitten – the detail captured on these tapes was unbelievable. Not only did they contain the typical song of say a Whinchat, but then went on to provide examples of the sub song, calls, alarm calls, and an example of vocal mimicry where the bird included an almost perfect imitation of the final flourish of a Chaffinch's refrain, and notes from a Bullfinch song.

I'd never come across this sort of information before, and had to track down the rest of the series.

British Bird Vocabulary was produced in 1979 by Victor Lewis, and was, in his own words, taken from the introduction, "a new way of learning to identify and understand bird sounds", covering 127 species in 710 examples over the series of 6 volumes, so that's 12 cassettes, each volume devoted to a specific habitat. Just think about that depth of coverage. I'm passionate about bird song, and have built up what I think is an enjoyable collection of CDs (with considerable help and encouragement from Phil Rudkin), but the modern commercial offerings give say song and call – who could afford the time and expense to do more?

Yet here in the late 70's was Vic Lewis, who recorded, compiled, wrote and produced the whole series (with assistance on numerous tracks from one Patrick Sellar !!), creating a scientific document in sound. Again I quote his own words here, but I couldn't describe it better – sitting listening to these cassettes is like spending a day in the relevant habitat, accompanied by an expert, guiding you through what you are hearing – not just which species, but trying to give you an idea of what is happening, why the bird is making a particular sound and what it means.

The six volumes cover:

Vol 1	Towns, Parks and Gardens
Vol 2	Farmland
Vol 3	Woodland
Vol 4	Open Woodland, Copse and Hedgerow
Vol 5	Heathland, Mountain and Moorland
Vol 6	Freshwater Margins & Marshland

The foreword to Vol 1 is by P.A.D. Hollom, and perusing this, coupled with a fascinating chat with Pat Sellar at the recent local members' meeting in Leamington has given me an amazing insight into the work involved, and the dedication of Vic Lewis to capturing bird sounds. In an attempt to retain the utmost fidelity he only used a parabolic reflector on 2 tracks (out of 710 remember), and never used a gun mike – instead he opted for a plain mic or 3, placed up close and personal to the subject.

He admits to spending 175 hours to capture the Dartford Warbler's song, basic call and anxiety call, 55 hours to a single pair of Corn Buntings, or how about over 100 hours for Hobbies, which included building a platform on 80 feet of scaffold to get close enough to capture the sounds he wanted.

I'm afraid I could bore for England extolling the beauty of these recordings – there were quite a few delegates at the BTO Conference in December who went away either slightly shell-shocked or determined to find copies for themselves – indeed I supplied new cassette versions to a couple of converts ( I couldn't record them onto CD at that stage), and even the guy from the NHBS stand looked rather sheepish when he had the audacity to compare Jean Roche's offering "Bird Songs and calls of Britain and Europe" on 4 CDs with that of Vic Lewis at dinner one evening.



The poor chap was dragged out into a snow bound car park to listen to a couple of tracks on my car stereo – but he did take it well, and conceded that the modern offering of 403 species with one track a piece couldn't compare with the maestro!!! On reflection I still think he was suitably impressed – he may just have been worried about the rapid onset of frost-bite.

One of the tracks which stands out for me is the recording of a Kingfisher feeding its young – you hear the calls of the young in their burrow, the whir of wings as the adult arrives, and then scrabbling as the adult backs out of the nest burrow, a brief whir of wings and then a splash as it plunges into the stream to clean its feathers, much splashing as it bathes, and then furious whirring as it flies away again. This was captured with one mike at the nest entrance, and another some 150 yards downstream, where Vic had identified a favoured bathing spot. That for me is dedication and true field craft – a true inspiration to a floundering amateur like me.

It's too easy to go on (I promise not to!!), because every cassette contains gems – how about recordings of a Robin giving its Spring and then Autumn song – we've all heard this referred to, but how often are you presented with the evidence? Or Tawny Owl chicks snapping their bills in aggression, or the different sounds produced by various chicks as they age – with examples from 1 day old, up until fledging at 40 days?

Not only are we told that the Marsh Warbler is a master of mimicry, we are given a full sequence of song, containing 30 vocal elements from 13 different species, all of which is clearly broken down in the accompanying text.

Cassettes are no longer fashionable, but please, if you come across this series, or indeed, if you have a set which you've not listened to for many years, buy them or listen to them again – I'm sure you will be as enthralled as I am - listening to one of Vic's cassettes is the next best thing to spending a day in the field yourself – in my case it's possibly better, because you hear, and understand, everything which is going on.

This write up wouldn't have been possible without the help of 2 very special guys – Phil Rudkin and Pat Sellar – to whom I'd like to finish by expressing my sincere thanks. Without their help I'd never have been given access to the full series of cassettes – searching on Amazon and even using Google had failed to produce more than 2 more volumes.

I know Pat shares my admiration for Vic's work, and used many of his recordings for the hard-to-get sounds, such as calls at the nest etc, when he was pulling together sounds for the full BWP series – and such detail can only enhance one's pleasure in ornithology, and I sincerely hope that more members will be tempted to give Vic's cassettes a try – I guarantee you won't be disappointed.

## **FEL Communications Preamplifiers - more sound - less noise**

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FEL preamps help to improve recordings in two ways:

The microphone signal is amplified at source enabling a higher recording level onto tape or disk.

The amplification is high quality, ultra low noise so contributes much less noise to a recording than most built in microphone amps. With this extra level effectively from the microphone it is possible to record with less gain, and therefore less hiss from the recorder's amplifier.

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**www.micbooster.com**

# Sound Magazine Comments

Compiled by Jenny Beasley

## Edition 162

Congratulations to Geoff on an excellent first issue and for taking on this difficult task. His voice was described by members as pleasant, mellow and soothing and his style refreshing, with plenty of enthusiasm. Phil Riddett was a hard act to follow, but Geoff has done well. His enunciation was found to be very clear and pronunciation good, with a clean, intimate acoustic. David Tombs thought the voice level needed to be higher to match the inserts, but I found myself disagreeing with this.

Simon Elliott pointed out that this first CD doesn't give Geoff much scope to show his production flair, it being necessarily a bit of a list. However, it's always good to hear the best that WSRS can offer, at least in competitive terms.

There were some excellent recordings among winners and losers. For the losers, they should remember that a recording also needs to tell a story to win a competition. Several were of excellent quality, very interesting, but too monotonous and lacking in variety for this context.

Remember also that the judges won't know if a species was rare where it was recorded. He feels the rare recordings would be better submitted to the Sound Magazine rather than the competition.

## 2009 Competition Winners:

### Class 1 – Individual:

#### **3 Rufous Whistler**

Simon Elliott

This was an excellent and skillful recording, with a very quiet background and close miking. Michael Gardner thought it demonstrated nicely the capabilities of the diminutive Olympus when coupled with a high quality 'front end'.

#### **5 Nightingale in the Early Morning**

Bernd Eggert

For Michael, the full frequency range of the Nightingale was well reproduced, but David thought the bird rather distant. Philip Radford found it beautifully clear and evocative, and enjoyed the Cuckoo in the background. He preferred this to the winner, partly because the species was familiar to him.

### Class 2 – Species:

#### **7 White Storks at Dusk**

Alan Burbidge

This clattering display was very well recorded and the background very quiet. Simon thought the stereo reflector set-up handled it well.

#### **9 Great Bowerbird Display**

Simon Elliott

Philip found these vocalizations strange and intriguing, but the piece had considerable merit and David thought it library standard.

### Class 3 – Encounter:

#### **11 Duetting Cranes and Carrion Crow near the big city**

Bernd Eggert (Silver Fox)

For Philip, the contrast between the two vocalizing species, with such differing qualities, made this an outstanding recording. Simon thought it a lovely recording and an unusual combination, but he would have liked more of a story. David heard a touch of rumble, otherwise it was good.

#### **13 Time for Bed**

Paul Pratley

This was a pleasing mix of well-known species, with lots happening, but Simon thought it lacked variation. Michael found it a lovely medley of squeaks, whistles and squawks – were the birds roosting in a reed-bed?

### Class 4 – Habitat:

#### **15 Iron Range Dawn**

Roger Boughton

Ian Todd found this action-packed soundscape absolutely breath-taking. He heard no systemic noise at all, which he found surprising, as the 8000 range of new Sennheiser MKH mics have more self-noise and slightly less gain than the classic range. Was some low-pass filtering employed? Very well done, Roger. Simon thought the binaural set-up lacked depth, but the loud sounds were nicely centered and the rich habitat had a good dynamic range.

#### **17 Night in the Vargea Forest by boat**

Ian Todd

This was pure magic, great atmosphere. Ian did well to hold the mics still and avoid creaking noises from the boat. Simon wondered if this was our first recording from Columbia. The amphibian is known elsewhere as the Cane Toad, of course. Ian commented that he doesn't wish to appear pedantic, but the habitat was seasonally-inundated gallery forest called varzea forest, as opposed to terra firma forest. He doesn't know where 'vargea' came from.

### Class 5 – Creative:

#### **19 Channel-billed Cuckoos**

Roger Boughton

An excellent entry, which certainly stimulated Philip's imagination. There was a nice echo, with variable close and distant calls, and the second half was very powerful. Simon would have found it instructive to know about the creative element here – he would guess just some clever mixing. They really are a scary big bird.

### Reserved:

#### **21 Garden Warbler**

Ian Brady

A high quality, close recording of a great songster with a well-balanced background, not over-busy. A worthwhile winner.

#### **23 Eastern Jewel (Red-flanked Bluetail)**

Harry J Lehto

This was a fine, close recording with just a bit of reverb to highlight the song-phrases – library standard. The species is quite rare, even in Finland, so Philip congratulates the recordist.



Simon welcomed a new name in the list of winners. He advised a bit more care should be taken with the fade-out.

### **Non-avian Award:**

#### **25 Rutting Fallow Deer**

Bernd Eggert

There was great praise for this recording. The deer sounded really close, and there was a pleasing acoustic, with lots of depth and presence to these belching calls. The Røde NT1A mics certainly perform well – Ian points out that they have the lowest self-noise of any microphone on the market and they are relatively cheap, but they are on the heavy side.

### **Boughton Field-craft Award:**

#### **27 Orange-footed Scrubfowl**

Roger Boughton

Philip is amazed at the variety of vocalizing bird species to be found in Australia – it makes him quite envious. Another scary bird, Simon noted, especially as they do this throughout the night. This was a good sequence with a nice background. He would like to know details of what Roger did to earn the Field-craft award – this is crucial, after all.

### **Other Entries:**

#### **Class 1:**

#### **29 Woodlark**

Alan Burbidge

A fine recording of one of Philip's favourite species, all too rare in the UK. Ian thought it should have been placed – a nicely detailed, clean and interesting piece.

#### **31 Starlings in the Chimney**

Jonathan Bulfin

A classic, an opportunity well taken. An interesting sequence, happily not ruined by falling soot, but Simon thought it must be a noisy living-room.

#### **33 Reed Warbler**

Philip Radford

David heard a bit of rumble, but it was a good recording.

#### **35 Mistle Thrush**

Jenny Beasley

Philip thought this a powerful bird, a good songster, with more variation than many. A bit distant for David, but the echo/reflections were good and placed one in woodland. Simon heard a bit of hiss.

#### **37 Tooth-billed Bowerbird**

Roger Boughton

For Simon, it was an interesting call, though it promised but never quite delivered.

#### **39 Bonelli's Warbler**

Ian Todd

This was a good recording of a never-very-remarkable song; Simon found Geoff's contribution valuable. Philip thought it an interesting piece – clearly, we must remember that Eastern and Western Bonelli's Warblers have different songs.

#### **41 Strange Common Pheasant**

André and Odile Boucher

David found it strange, indeed; nicely recorded and so close. For Simon it was a great sound, well recorded, but a bit monotonous, so not a competition entry for him.

#### **43 Common Nightingale**

Denis White

A library-standard recording – clean, but Michael noted it was slightly lacking in lower frequencies, probably because of the use of a reflector. For Philip, this should have been a competition winner.

#### **45 Hoopoe**

Philip Rudkin

A good, close recording, showing the bird is named after its song, which could drive David mad!

#### **47 The Pure-toned Bird (White's Thrush)**

Harry J Lehto

A fascinating call, and a most interesting recording, but Simon felt it would have been better as a contribution to the sound magazine, with an interesting story attached. It reminded Philip of Ring Ousel song. The bird was named in honour of Gilbert White, apparently, although he never mentioned the species.

#### **49 Grasshopper Warbler**

Paul Pratley

A near-perfect recording; it is so easy to over-modulate this species.

### **Class 2:**

#### **51 Common Gulls Mating**

Jenny Beasley

David and Simon really liked this. A clean, interesting, varied subject, with rich calls and a pleasant background.

#### **53 Nocturnal Fruit-eaters (Oilbirds)**

Ian Todd

Cor! Some goings on there (David). Simon would have scored this highly – great acoustic, plenty of movement. Well done, Ian!

#### **55 Rain? No, Ants near the hill**

André and Odile Boucher

A compelling sound picture – Michael could almost smell the formic acid. Whenever he sees Wood Ants surfacing he is reminded Spring is on the way. David thought it fantastic – just add some thunder. A wee bit monotonous for Simon.

#### **57 Underneath the Village Bridge**

Philip Rudkin

A good recording, a bit lacking in interest – a recurring problem with amphibians according to Simon.

#### **59 - 74 Sound Quiz**

David said he didn't do very well with this at the meeting. Simon felt it a shame the answers were printed on the sheet.

### **Feedback:**

Michael takes Geoff's point regarding the equipment details. It may be tedious at times, especially as, with modern recorders, most pieces are of good quality. However, it can be useful to illustrate the sound quality that has been achieved using various combinations of equipment. Ian finds the information very interesting and useful, so the present practice has his vote. I, too, find the details of equipment very interesting, and feel this is as much a part of the recording as behaviour, song variations, etc, which should also interest us. However, I do find the inclusion of spoken scientific names unwieldy, and feel they should be confined to the printed sheet, which, incidentally, I think is much improved this time.

**Edition 163**

Simon Elliott thanks Geoff for including a bit more information about recording techniques. It makes it all much more interesting. Class 3 continues to sit on the fence and cause problems for the entrants. There were good and timely links to journal articles.

David Tombs compliments Geoff on a very smooth delivery – a pleasure to listen to. A few edits were needed on some go-backs, but nothing to disturb him.

**2009 Competition Entries:****Class 3:**

**2 Subalpine Warbler & Nightingale** Alan Burbidge  
Philip Radford liked the contrast of the songs of the two species and found the piece pleasing. Simon felt the two named species weren't dominant enough, so it was more of a habitat. Gerard Grant thought it a pleasant recording, but the stereo was a little narrow. David didn't like it – thought it a bit of a mess. The soloists sang well, but where was the orchestra in the opera?

**4 Drumming & Singing – Great Spotted Woodpecker & Song Thrush** Philip Radford  
Gerard liked the perspective on both subjects, but found the recording a bit hissy, when set alongside many digital recordings. For David, this was a habitat, plain and simple. It seems to me the definition of 'Habitat' is in dispute, here, and perhaps needs discussion. I think a piece with two dominant species does fit best into this class.

**6 Pied Butcherbird & Australian Reed Warbler** Jenny Beasley  
Philip found the tonal quality of the Butcherbird's song most attractive, and it contrasted well with the Reed Warbler. He was interested that its specific name was 'stentorius', but the song was hardly that. He was quite right – the name is 'australis'! I expect this must have been my mistake on the original form. Both Simon and David felt this more of a habitat, but my previous comment also applies here. For Gerard, the nice, wide stereo captured the scene well.

**8 Intruder Alarm – White-plumed Honeyeater & White-breasted Woodswallow.** Roger Boughton  
Simon felt this one fitted the category. Probably a ground predator about. As always, the binaural recording had him reaching for the headphones. Gerard listened on headphones, but didn't really get the binaural sense. He enjoyed the sounds and movement.

**10 Golden Oriole & Turtle Dove** Ian Todd  
Philip loves to hear the purring song of the Turtle dove, and it contrasted well with the special quality of the Oriole's song. Simon didn't think the named species were dominant enough, but it was pleasing.

Gerard is not sure MS in a reflector is best when a number of species are present, as it tends to pull all the reflected sounds to the centre. He enjoyed the oriole – wonderful song.

**12 A Mute Predator? – Redwing & Bullfinch** André & Odile Boucher  
Simon would have scored this highly – plenty of activity, clearly behavioural. The Bullfinch came in nicely in the second half. Philip noted that the Bullfinch alarms were not quite the same as in the UK.

**14 Heathland Sounds – Stonechat et al** Philip Rudkin  
This was thought to be just a good 'species' recording.

**16 The Birds of Tuonela – Tengmalm's, Long-eared & Pygmy Owls** Herry Lehto  
The Tengmalm's Owl dominated here, but it was a great recording. Philip thought the Tengmalm's Owl calls must be very thrilling to hear at night. Simon was not sure he could hear the Pygmy Owl. Gerard found this an unusual recording – good to hear. He detected a faint background hum.

**Class 4:**

**18 Night on the Marshes – Whooper Swan, Teal, Mallard, Fox** Alan Burbidge  
For David, this was a splendid 'species' recording. Simon thought it captured the Caerlaverock atmosphere perfectly, but needed a bit more bass for a competition entry.

**20 On the Level – Marsh Frog, Cetti's Warbler, Blackcap, Bluetit young** Paul Pratley  
The dominant Marsh Frog made this a 'species' recording – a splendid one, though. Simon didn't know the Somerset levels had Marsh Frogs. Gerard thought they were nice sounds, but rather grouped together on the right, with little on the left to counterbalance them.

**22 In the Old Orchard – Blackbird, Wren, Chiffchaff, Garden Warbler** Jenny Beasley  
This was a well-balanced atmosphere recording with no rumble – definitely England. The Garden Warbler was in fine song, Philip thought.

**24 Clearfell at Dawn – Snipe, Wren, Meadow Pipit** Simon Elliott  
Philip is always thrilled to hear the snipe display, and this was beautifully recorded. Gerard thought it a lovely piece that brought the remote place to life. David also liked it, but detected some rumble.

**26 Springtime in Aukland – Kittiwake, Common Guillemot, Razorbill** Denis White  
This was a fine habitat recording, but David felt the Guillemots were too close. A clever, misleading title, and Simon thought the close auks were excellent. Gerard found the calls good and intimate, but a little too infrequent to keep his interest.

**28 French Dawn Chorus – Cirl Bunting, Robin, Nightingale, Great Tit, Hoopoe, Dunnock** Philip Rudkin  
At last, said Simon, a story! The bells added a perfect touch. David thought the fade-out would have been better during, rather than between, the bell peals. Gerard liked the bell, which added atmosphere, but he was not sure it was right for the competition.



**30 Pondside**

Bernd Eggert

Top marks from Philip. What a lot of species, here. A pleasing atmospheric recording with good position changes of species, thought David.

**32 1st of May – Capercaillie (female), Blackbird, Robin, Black Grouse**

Harry Lehto

David was charmed by this piece. Full marks from Philip, too, and it was an achievement to include Capercaillie calls. Gerard found it very interesting. This is not a call he has heard before. He is used to the “marble going down the plug-hole” sound.

**Class 5:****34 Scottish Rain Forest – Tawny Owl**

James How

David thought this good, but mixed recordings do not appeal to Philip – they are too good to be true! Simon would like to know about the creative element. For Gerard, it was just a bit too noisy and the owl was not dominant enough.

**Members' submissions:****36 WSRs Field Meetings**

Alan Burbidge

This was an excellent documentary from a WSRs stalwart and constant supporter. Simon would like more members to introduce their own recordings, as suggested by Geoff in the last journal. Philip and Rosemary were filled with nostalgia for times past. Alan had good teachers, some of whom are, sadly, no longer with us, and clearly he did not neglect their advice. The Bittern was amazing, the fox especially good, and the geese mind-blowing. Well done. Alan.

For Gerard, this was a pleasant set of reminiscences and recordings. He believes Alan and he were, in the early 80s, the youngest members of WSRs. 1983 was the year he met RM and purchased his first Atherstone reflector.

He also recalls the Woodchester meetings and the ever-helpful Ray Goodwin. It was his first chance to meet the man who set the monthly sound competition on Radio 4's “Wildlife” programme, which he so looked forward to, and which spurred him on to start wildlife recording. He loved the geese fly-past – excellent, absolutely first class – and the Skylark at the end enhanced the contrast.

**38 Brown Hare**

David Mellor

Short, but very sweet! One for the British Library.

**40 Pacific Baza**

Tony Baylis

Good recording, thought David, pity about the tin shed rattles. An interesting raptor, lovely in flight against a blue sky, Simon remembered.

**42 White-winged Chough**

Tony Baylis

Lovely sounds. In my experience, these are hard to get close to, so Tony has done well.

**44 Apostlebirds**

Tony Baylis

A superb recording, good sense of movement, nice dove in the background. Simon thought it should have been in the competition.

**46 Eyre Creek**

Tony Baylis

What a cast list! An excellent habitat recording. All of the many species are unknown to Philip. Simon also enjoyed it, as did David – excellent stereo, but too much bass rumble.

**47 - 56 Techniques discussed in the journal**

Gerard Grant

This was a valuable and thought-provoking contribution, well linked to the journal article, and a worthwhile demonstration. Sadly, Simon's worsening unilateral deafness makes it difficult to appreciate the nuances of stereo imagery, but he liked the alternative way of mounting the MKH 30 in a reflector.

## Recording in Newfoundland 2010

**John Neville**

On the evening of June 3, we headed from the ferry dock at North Sydney Nova Scotia for a six hour trip to Port aux Basque. We were planning to record the birds of Newfoundland's hotspots. The first stop on the West Coast of Nfld was the Codroy Valley. The Codroy river lead down to an estuary, all but enclosed by a sandpit. The enclosed brackish water is called marachois. Trails lead to beaches, salt marshes, along brooks and through the woods.

At our first campsite, only a sand dune separated us from a colony of twenty pairs of Common Tern. Just across the road was a sign asking people not to let their dogs run free on the beach, that supported nesting Piping Plovers. I'm not a regular lister, but I do tend to evaluate my working day by the number of good bird song recordings I make.

Walking towards a lighthouse in the fog, I did make good recordings of the terns, Lincoln Sparrow and Alder Fly-catcher. I was not so lucky with Ring-billed Gull, Blackpoll Warbler, Yellow Warbler and Merlin.



**Cape St Mary's Ecological Reserve**

Following the coast north, our next stop was Gros Morne National Park. The rocks in this World Heritage Site tell wondrous stories from a billion years ago, ancient seabeds, volcanoes, continents colliding, the rising of the Appalachian Mountain Chain and the sculpting of the landscape by the last Ice Age. Its cliffs and fiords face westward into the Gulf of St Lawrence. The park brochure advertises more than 700 flowering plants and 239 bird species. A roadside sign cautioned "14 Moose collisions so far this year". The Tableland was covered with plants no more than 15cm tall called Tuckamore or Krumholz.

Even though some of the trees are quite old their vertical growth is stunted by the sandblasting effect of wind and winter ice crystals. On our first afternoon, I was able to record good sounds of Tennessee and Black-throated Green Warblers on the Lomond River trail. Early the next morning, Common Loons were calling from the bay and Osprey were circling overhead. Our favourite location in the park, was the trail to Westbrook Pond. The pond is actually a landlocked fiord. After the ice retreated, the shoreline rebounded, cutting off the fiord from the ocean. Memorable birds at this location were Lesser Yellowlegs, Yellow-bellied Flycatcher, Black-and-White Warbler and Hermit Thrush.

Terra Nova National Park was next. It was about 380 km further along Highway 1 in east central Nfld. The hoots of a pair of Great Horned Owl got me out of bed at 3 am. It was a perfectly calm morning, and they were easy to record. As I was questioning why they were calling so late in the season, the answer came, in the form of an owlet begging. It was one of those good days at Sandy Pond, when an Olive-sided Flycatcher, the tremolo calls of a Common Loon (Great Northern Diver), Chipping Sparrow, songs of a Yellow-rumped Warbler and the contact calls of his mate, all came easily to the microphone.

This park also boasts more than 200 annual bird species. Unfortunately from a nature recordist's point of view, the noise from the Trans Canada highway carries across too much of the park. Shortly after moving off, a Moose stopped us in the middle of the road. It was as if he were telling us to pause and enjoy the forest.



**Atlantic Puffin Witlass Bay**



**Common Murre & Black Legged Kittiwake  
Witlass Bay**

Our next stop was at the bird colony at Cape St Mary's Ecological Reserve. The cliff walk was about 1.4 km long. Before we reached the colony, the smell of rotting fish and guano carried to us on the wind. At the end of the trail was a 25m gap separating us from a stack covered by birds. The Gannet and Black-legged Kittiwake were most numerous, with Razorbill and Black Guillemot lower down the 100m cliff. The birds were lined up on the ledges like produce at the supermarket. A gannet flew over our heads on white wings nearly 2m across. Hanging from his bill were the heads and tails of four Capelin.

I was once in a fishing boat where Gannets were diving like darts barely causing a ripple on the ocean surface. The Gannetry is one of six around Nfld and the Gulf of St Lawrence. The barren lands leading to the colony are like open tundra without the permafrost. We enjoyed Willow Ptarmigan, Horned Lark, two pairs of Short-eared Owl, American Pipit, Palm Warbler and the lovely songs of many Fox Sparrows. On the evening of June 17, I was delighted to speak to 35 Nfld Naturalists at Memorial University in St John's. They enjoyed my recordings and stories from across Canada.

Our last major birding site was Gull Island in Witlass Bay. Thousands of Common Murre (in Newfoundlandese they are known as turr or the Baccalieu bird and in Europe they are known as Guillemot), Black-legged Kittiwake, Herring Gull and Atlantic Puffin lined the cliffs and swam around our chartered Zodiac. With the engine turned off we drifted quietly along the foot of the cliffs- with one hand for me and one hand for the microphone.

Newfoundland is a great place to visit but allow yourself a little extra time if you are hoping to record. The weather conditions are challenging, like northern Scotland!

Further information available at:

[www.nevillerecording.com](http://www.nevillerecording.com)

**Pictures by Heather Neville**



# Recording Bats and Insects on an Budget

Al Milano

## Introduction

I realise that many Insect recording enthusiasts (myself included), really enjoy discovering and identifying new insects in the field. Many of us have amassed quite a collection of field guides for birds, insects, and even mammals. The practice of locating and identifying creatures in the field, has reached the pinnacle of popularity with birders. And so, now there are various "Birding By Ear" titles of book/audio CD sets. Essentially, What I'm indicating here can be referred to as "Bugging By Ear". After enjoying this fun activity for a short time, I've found that I am now able to recognize quite a few local insects by sound. It's pretty cool!

I've collected several years' worth of recordings of the ultrasonic calls of the bats in the area at night. This is accomplished simply by setting up various bat detectors and recording devices on my back windows in the evenings. I've recently become very interested in the sounds of singing insects (well, obsessed is probably more accurate!).

Many of you may have an unbelievable amount of singing insects, right in your back gardens. Having access to rural areas makes it easy to create wonderfully noise-free recordings of all manner of species. And, this of course includes animals which produce sounds in the ultrasonic spectrum - outside the range of our normal human hearing. The challenge for folks who have access to rural landscapes however, will be to separate out all of the simultaneous insect calls that you will undoubtedly be recording.

On the other hand, however, hearing/recording a singing insect in an urban environment can be considered a great accomplishment. Because of the fact, that there are so many odds stacked against the recordist. If you consider the conditions, not the least of which is the lack of suitable habitat. It can sometimes seem like a miracle when you are able to hear just one! To make a decent recording of any, is indeed a milestone to be proud of. Most times, it will require you to utilise all of your recording skills. Knowing when to press the Record button, microphone placement and good post-recording editing skills will prove useful. Some good news about an urban setting, is that there will usually only be a few (2-3) different species of singing insects at any one time. This makes later identification quite easy.

When attempting to create ambient sound recordings of these creatures, we leave our microphones open to all of the other ambient sounds commonly heard in a less than ideal area. This usually amounts to many of the undesirable noises of the city; which can be very frustrating to someone living in an urban area plagued with distractions. For those of us who find ourselves living in cities, or not-so-rural areas, there are usually some challenges to overcome, especially when attempting to capture recordings of insects that produce sounds within the normal range of human hearing.

For someone living in an urban or suburban area, and interested in recording insects or bats, there is hope. If one wants to increase their level of success and enjoyment, the answer is simple, focus on ultrasounds. The reasons for this are also simple- there are hardly any man-made sounds being produced in the ultrasonic realm. Ultrasound recording provides an opportunity to capture some interesting sound recordings, right outside your door. The convenience of this is inspiring. Granted, there may be the occasional rattling of something metallic in the vicinity, but all things considered - it is a relatively silent canvas, except of course, for the interesting wildlife faithfully producing sounds from about dusk till dawn. What I'm referring to here, are the two types of creatures that seldom fail to be heard: the bugs and bats - two of my favourite recording subjects!

## Getting Started / Equipment

As for recorders - We have all heard (or read) that low-cost recorders, such as the type described below, should be avoided at all costs. Just about all of the sound recording experts agree on this. I will go out on a limb here, and will have to respectfully disagree. Simply because, for those of us on a low budget, they can be serviceable. I've even discovered that my relatively low-cost Olympus DS-30 performs favourably when compared to my new Zoom H2, for example.

Sometimes I prefer to use it with an external mic, or even the provided stereo mics for some quick insect recordings. The stereo mic attachment that comes with the unit, isn't really all that bad. Furthermore, it does feature a 44.1 kHz sampling rate, after all. Let us also keep in mind, that because of its size, it's convenient to have it with you at all times. This, in turn, ensures that you will never miss a serendipitous recording opportunity.



Olympus VN-900 with Sony mic, VN-4100PC & DS30



This kit is considered by many to be a very low-cost recorder. For even lower cost recorders, there is the Olympus VN-900 digital recorder.

I am discussing very low-cost, ultra-portable recorders here; for the benefit of those who would like to try recording, but are not prepared to purchase the commonly recommended kits. Needless to say, the recording set-ups recommended on the WSRS' site (under the title "Newcomer's Guide") are absolutely ideal.

So, by all means check out:

<http://www.wildlife-sound.org/equipment/newcomersguide/index.html>

I will confess that I have read, and re-read, that section of the web-site, and have admired those great equipment recommendations for years! Recently, I did manage to acquire a Sennheiser MKE 300 mic and it works a treat!

Getting started in ultrasound recording can be done with a minimal amount of inexpensive equipment. All that is needed to begin, is an inexpensive bat detector (also known as an ultrasonic detector), a relatively short audio cable (3.5mm plugs on each end), and a suitable inexpensive digital recorder.

I usually prefer to use an actual bat detector, hooked up to a recorder for the recording of bats and bugs. The ultrasonic detector is useful for recording the various insects that are best heard in the ultrasonic realm. On most occasions, I have had good results using very simple (and inexpensive) bat detectors along with affordable digital recorders such as: Olympus models VN-900 and VN-4100PC. Or the slightly more expensive DS-30 / DS-40, which each have a sampling rate of 44.1kHz.

For those who already own very good, or high end recording equipment - for example, a recorder with a sampling rate of 96kHz or higher, there is more good news - You already have the equipment needed to

record many singing insects (and even many bats) that are sounding off on warm Spring and Summer evenings.

It may surprise some readers to know, that many modern laptops have sound cards which have a sampling rate of at least 44.1kHz and most times, even higher! One could try recording, with just about any external mic. You just need one that will plug into the microphone jack (3.5mm) of your laptop. By the way, I don't mean to say, to try recording with the tiny hole, which is a laptop's built-in mic. That would not provide good results, it would pick up far too much ambient sound and noise. Just about any type of external microphone that you can plug into the microphone input of your computer may prove to be suitable. To start out, any mic will do - including the microphone that came with your computer. Also, there are plenty of inexpensive aftermarket stereo microphones available. The Sony microphone (pictured) was very inexpensive. These can be fun to experiment with.

As many of you are aware, a recorder with a 96 kHz sampling frequency will record sound up to around half this frequency, giving you the potential to record ultrasounds being produced up to 48 kHz. If you are lucky enough to have obvious/visible groups of bats frequenting your area in the evenings, then it is just a matter of going out and pointing your microphone(s) towards them. If you are using a recorder as mentioned above, then upon playback, you will hear the clicks, chirps, and "feeding buzzes" of the bats as they go about their nightly foraging activities.

The same holds true for katydids and other insects that produce ultrasonic sounds. To record these, simply direct your microphone(s) to the various vegetation, shrubs and trees close by. Point your mic(s) at each area of vegetation, for several moments. This will typically reward the recordist with some of the steady ultrasonic clicks, etc. produced by the insects.

### **Recording "singing" Insects**

I am very interested in singing insects and have been for quite a while now. What I like to do, is make some recordings; sometimes take notes, etc. Then, later consult field guides and even free online resources which provide recordings of commonly encountered insects. You're essentially identifying the insect that you recorded earlier. You'd be surprised at just how much "scientific research" I'm able to do, just from the 2 windows which face the back garden.

My detecting and recording of singing insects is comprised of nightly recording set-ups, on my back window sill. I've always been on the lookout for an even more sensitive bat detector. I also build inexpensive bat detector kits, using circuit boards, components, etc. Of course, I've also been into recording the ultrasounds of bats - for many years.

I happen to have a modest collection of bat detectors, from old beginner's models to cutting-edge technology. In fact, at one point, I needed to thin out the herd a bit - And ended up selling quite a few. I have built quite a few detectors that were supplied in electronic kit form. I've written in-depth reviews of bat detectors.



***VN-900 with aftermarket Sony microphone***

I've compared and rigorously tested various models, (both kits & pre-built) from all over the world. After all of that testing and comparing, there is one that I can wholeheartedly recommend. I've found this unit to be able to detect insects (and bats) in trees, well over 50 metres away! The one that I've found to be the absolute best performer (easily out-performing others costing 4 times as much) is the Batbox Baton (from <http://www.batbox.com> ). And luckily, it happens to be inexpensive as well! right around the 100 USD mark.

A truly excellent book on the subject is :

'*The Songs Of Insects*' by Lang Elliott and Wil Hershberger (the insect photos in this book nearly took my breath away!), simply amazing. They even have a neat site, where you can listen to some sample recordings

[www.musicofnature.com/songsofinsects/index.html](http://www.musicofnature.com/songsofinsects/index.html)

Along with large colour photos and info, a sonogram is provided for each insect which can help you positively identify the recorded subject.

For those who are so inclined, there are a couple of free audio software packages to be downloaded from the web. These will allow you to create your own sonograms, and then compare them with those in the book. Very cool!

And, as far as sonogram software is concerned, I have used many. These include both free and purchased products, and I have a great recommendation for a free programme called Audacity. One of the things I like about this software is how easy it is to use.

Another free application is Raven Lite 1.0. Either of these applications will allow one to transfer their insect recordings, to their laptop/desktop PC, using the same 3.5mm stereo audio cable used when connecting your bat detector to your recording device. Most importantly, you will be able to produce sonograms, which can then be used for analysis and comparison.

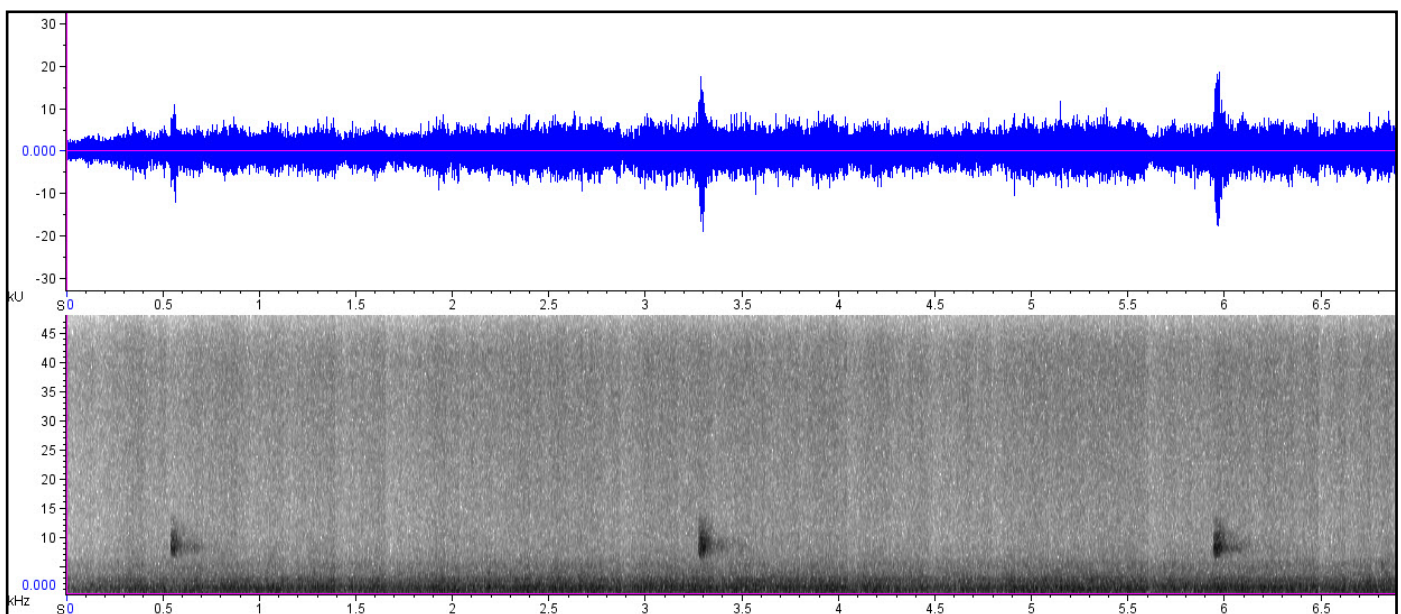
The official page for Audacity, including the free download link is:

<http://audacity.sourceforge.net/>

A fully functioning free version of Raven software is available from The Cornell Lab of Ornithology:

<http://www.birds.cornell.edu/brp/Raven/RavenOverview.html>

Among the other (free) programmes I use, is one called Spectrogram 16. It happens to be very easy to use, and works great.



***Greater Angle Wing Katydid Sonogram created with Raven Lite 1.0***

At the time of writing, the company's original website:

<http://www.visualizationsoftware.com/gram.html>

is no longer active. Fortunately the software is still out there for free download from a number of places.

I have uploaded it to two locations, so that anyone can download it right away:

<http://www.mediafire.com/?V69fbrf42dp5808>

<http://www.filedropper.com/spectrogram16> -

Click on the Gray button labelled 'Download This File', the site will ask you to type in a four character security code ("Please enter the characters you see below:") and your download begins. Regardless of which link you download the free programme from, the installation of this software is self-extracting and self-explanatory - very easy.

#### **Explanation of the sonograms**

In regards to the Greater Angle Wing Katydid sonogram, created using Raven Lite 1.0 software, this particular recording/sonogram, was made using a Zoom H2. No bat detector or ultrasound device was used.

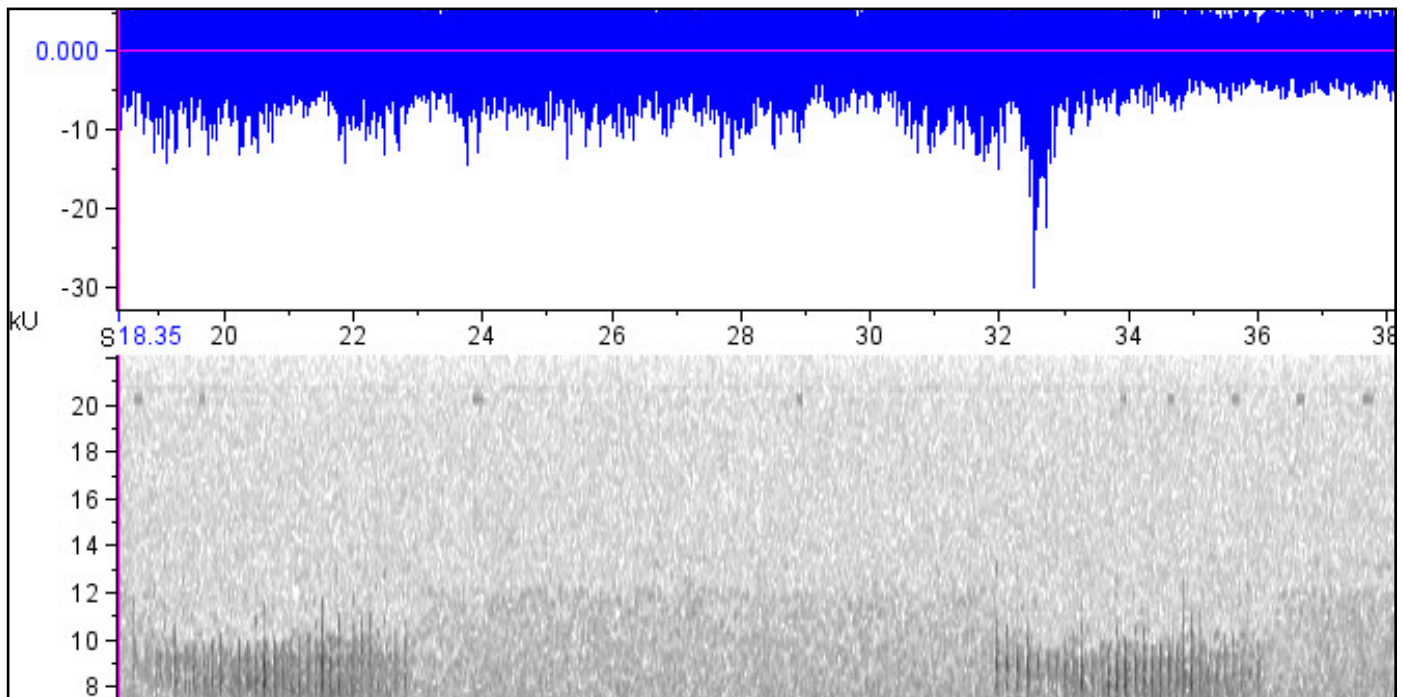
The Zoom H2/H1 recorders have the ability to record with a 96kHz sampling rate. Again a high sampling rate is able to pick up ultrasonic sounds. This recording could have also been made with several other digital recorders, or a high end laptop.

For the benefit of those who don't happen to already own a suitable digital recorder, I refer to a laptop PC, simply because these days, just about everyone has one. For instance, an example of a laptop (which I've been able to borrow) with a great quality sound-card is the HP HDX series of laptops. Almost any external microphone that you can plug into your laptop's 3.5mm microphone jack socket will provide satisfactory results.

OK, what if you have a laptop that's portable, and convenient to sit in your back garden with, for instance? But, it does not feature an outstanding soundboard? Well, another inexpensive option is to simply purchase a plug-and-play type of external sound-card.

The Cricket sample sonogram, created using Spectrogram 16 software, was made on an Olympus DS-30 digital recorder. Again, no bat detector or ultrasound device was needed.

This particular recorder has the ability to record with a 44.1kHz sampling rate. As stated before, a high sampling rate, is not needed in order to record most singing insects.



*Partial sonogram of a Cricket made with Spectrogram 16 software*

## **Conclusion**

Most of my insect recordings are from bugs that are sounding off from their perches on trees and shrubs. Upon walking to the backyard with my most sensitive bat detector, I've sometimes noticed stronger ultrasonic insect chirps coming from the (landlord's) vegetable garden. I've also noticed stronger sounds when walking up closer to trees and shrubs. In urban areas, singing insects can be heard (and sometimes seen) in a variety of places. And they aren't always resting in or on a patch of vegetation.

I've been having so much fun trying to get more & more insect recordings. In the meantime, I'm trying to (slowly) make some different microphones (they are easy to make). I actually enjoy buying the mic capsules and making my own microphones. It's fun to experiment with them. In any case, I urge you to give it a try.

Many very good recordings can be made, even using low-cost or DIY equipment. Some very nice recordings I have made were created with cheap digital voice recorders and home-made microphones.

The Summer months are of course the peak season for singing insects, but you'll also be able to record some insects (and bats) well into October. There are a lot of different singing insects out there, if we just take the time to stop and listen.

My trusty Olympus DS-30 is in my shirt pocket as I type this, as I've been going outside from time to time this evening, to try to record a singing insect that happens to be sounding off.

As the majority of the members here are well experienced recordists, I don't believe any further instructions are needed! I urge you to give it a try. You may find it as fascinating and enjoyable as I do - and lots of fun!

## **Photographs by the author**

Equipment pictures continue on next page





***A homemade parabolic microphone. It provides improved reception of distant bugs!***

## East Anglian Region Local Meeting 13th November 2010

### Bob Reed

A little later than usual or desirable, but unavoidable due to a number of other meetings and events clashing.

A regional meeting of East Anglian WSRS members was held on the 13th November 2010 at Little Shelford through the kind hospitality of David and Olga Hindley. Numbers were down on previous years with eight members attending, a lot of regular and familiar faces were missing for a variety of reasons and we look forward to seeing them again at the next meeting.

The day followed the usual format with a general discussion after coffee. One of the main issues raised was that of the electronic delivery of the Newsletter. It became apparent that some members had received the Newsletter electronically whilst others had not received a hard copy or apparently had any electronic communication. Whilst probably nobody's fault there was a general feeling that those opting for a hard copy were missing out on important dates and information. Since this meeting all these issues have been resolved and everyone is now being kept fully informed.

Also up for discussion was the fact that although there are a significant number of WSRS members in the East Anglian Region many of them do not attend our meeting and indeed a significant number had not responded to my e-mail invitation. We all felt that these meetings are a vital part of the life of the Society, I never come away from these meetings without new ideas and inspirations. Without them and proper contact with other members of the WSRS, I can see that my interest could decline.

When our next meeting is held for which a date will be published well in advance, it would be really good to see some of those members whose names only occur in the membership booklet. In the same vein there was a strong general feeling that we live in an excellent area for sound recording possibilities. Yes, we are plagued with extraneous noise but this has become a fact of life these days and can be avoided to a certain extent using a variety of strategies.

A significant proportion of the rest of the morning was given over to putting together a list of potential sound recording sites in East Anglia. Without too much trouble, and using the expertise of members present, we managed to put together a list of 20 recording venues covering a wide range of subjects. There is not room in this article to give the list and therefore I have asked that they form the basis of a separate article in the Journal.

We also had an excellent offer from Doug Ireland who would be prepared to organise a recording weekend on the Suffolk coast in the Spring. The meeting would not be residential but Doug could probably make the Village Hall available as a base and members could either travel just for a recording session or go bed-and-breakfast in the area.

Meetings of this type offer exciting possibilities and we should really be making more of areas like the Suffolk coast which are a rich and unexplored resource for wildlife recording. After an excellent buffet lunch provided by Margaret and Olga we retired upstairs to David's sound studio to listen to recordings from members. As usual we were not disappointed and even though only five members brought sounds for us to listen to, they were the usual intriguing and fascinating mix which makes our hobby so exceptional.

Doug Ireland played us the sound of a rare Fan-Tailed Warbler made at Lodmore in 1977, this was followed by the call of a Mediterranean Gull to illustrate how it differed from the call of other gulls. Our appetites were whetted and our imaginations stimulated by the sounds of Gannet's at Bempton cliffs. Finally, there was the call of a Yellow Wagtail at Horsey Mere in 1973. Jessica Finch had been on holiday to Spain and had recorded the sound of birds in the vicinity of an irrigation channel. These included what she believed was an Olivaceous Warbler.

Jenny Beasley's offerings firstly included a habitat recording 'In the old orchard', the recording was made using an Olympus LS11 and a microphone in a reflector. We could distinguish the calls and songs of Wren, Garden Warbler, Chiff Chaff, Carrion Crow and Blackbird with bees in the background. Her second sequence was of three different types of Crane from Australia in order that we could compare the three calls. The first was all the Common Norfolk Crane made on DAT, followed by the Sandhill Crane made using a Sound Devices recorder while the third species was the Borgas Crane. All three recordings had been made using a stereo setup.

Finally, there was a puzzling and un-identified sound made during the night for which the general consensus was that it was probably a crocodile!

Bill Seale brought a new concept to the idea of a 'duvet day' when he explained that the function of the duvet was to cover yourself, equipment and subject to stifle extraneous sounds when carrying out highly amplified recording of insect sounds which are his speciality. Bill had obviously been putting a Goliath Beetle through its paces and we were treated to the humming sound of the elytra as its wing muscles warmed up, sounds generated by ventilation movements in the abdomen and thorax, the sound of air squeaking in and out over the spiracles and finally stridulation by this same insect.

Next, Bill had taken a Longhorn Beetle from the Brecks as his subject. He demonstrated the sharp sounds this insect could make using its thorax and abdomen, he believed they were probably anti-predator sounds. These, including various stridulation sounds from a Leaf Beetle and a Wasp Beetle had been recorded on Sound Devices using a Sennheiser MKH 40 and had then been subjected to various electronic treatments to slow the sounds down and analyse their component parts.



***Bill sitting comfortably!***

All fascinating stuff giving us an insight into a world of which our hearing ability makes us largely oblivious. Lastly, Bob Reed played us some 'sound pictures' from Hatfield Forest. The sounds had been recorded prior to the development of Stansted airport and had been made on a Marantz cassette recorder and dubbed onto open reel. A sound mixer with pan pots had been used to make the sound pictures in what now seems like an archaic, but I have to say relatively straightforward way of making composite recordings. It certainly gave me a lot of fun making them and to my mind it is a creative although of course contrived, use of sound recordings.

The sound pictures included a dawn chorus, a Blackcap singing in a bramble patch on the forest plains to the distant background of the church bell and accompanied by a bumblebee. There was also a sound picture of woodmen cutting logs in the forest with a background of woodland birds including Nuthatch and Great Tit.



After a final chat and a cup of tea members departed late afternoon, with special thanks to David and Olga Hindley for their hospitality and for Margaret for providing such a splendid buffet lunch and refreshments.

It was agreed that meetings of this kind are a really worthwhile event for members and we look forward to the next one in October 2011.



## BARC AWARDS 2010

### Phil Rudkin

Two intrepid WSRS members from South Lincolnshire, Phil Rudkin and Terry Barnatt, braved the wilds of London on 13th November to receive BARC awards.

For a recording of dueting Nightingales Terry was presented with two trophies - the BBC Natural History Unit Trophy for First place in the Sounds from Nature Class and the Sennheiser Golden Microphone Trophy for Recording of the Year 2010, beating entries in all the ten competition classes.

He also won a complete Windshield Kit for his efforts, due to generous sponsorship from Rycote.



Phil received three diplomas. His 'Confrontation' was Second in the Sounds from Nature Class, his 'Woodland in May' came Third in the Documentary Class, and his 'Blackcap', Third in Reportage.

Philip Radford's 'In the Blackcap's territory' came Third in Sounds from Nature. Terry's 'Nightingales' also gained Second place in the Sounds of Nature class in the International Amateur Recording Contest, held in Slovakia.

Finally, happy, but tired, they negotiated their way back through the turmoil of the city to Terry's car, parked at Edgware Tube station, then to return to the quiet backwaters of Lincolnshire.

But ...only with a bit of luck. In the evening at the car park, Terry, due no doubt to the effects of such a heady day, managed to 'mislay' his ticket, needed to exit the car park. After a 'headless chicken' search, in the dark, he managed to find it on the ground!



*Terry receiving award from Tony Faulkner*

**RECORDING OF THE YEAR  
(SENNHEISER GOLDEN MICROPHONE)  
'NIGHTINGALES'  
by Terry Barnatt of Bourne, Lincs**

**Class 1 Speech & Drama** No Entries

**Class 2 Documentary**

- 1st Blind Organists \* by Simon Winkler of Cardiff
- 2nd Flight of the Falcon  
by Mike Dickins of Kidderminster
- 3rd Woodland in May  
by **Philip Rudkin** of Stamford

**Class 3A Music (Live)**

- 1st Beati Quelli \*  
by Geoffrey Smailwood of Histon Cambridge
- 2nd Dona Nobis Pacem  
by Geoffrey Smailwood of Histon Cambridge

- 3rd Organ Sonata in C minor  
by Stewart Smith of Riddlesden, W. Yorkshire

**Class 3B Music (Creative)**

- 1st An Englishman's Home \*  
by David Milner of New Mills Derbyshire
- 2nd At the End of the Day \*  
by Chris Gibson of Angus Tayside
- 3rd The Robin's Return with a Songthrush  
by Mike Thomson of Yateley Hants

**Class 4 Reportage**

- 1st Interview with Photographer  
by Simon Winkler of Cardiff
- 2nd Nightlight \*  
by Mike Dickins of Kidderminster
- 3rd The Blackcap  
by **Philip Rudkin** of Stamford

**Class 5 Technical Experiment** No Entries

**Class 6 Sounds from Nature**

- 1st Nightingales (GOLDEN MICROPHONE) \*  
by **Terry Barnatt** of Bourne Lincs
- 2nd Confrontation  
by **Philip Rudkin** of Stamford
- 3rd In the Blackcap's Territory  
by **Philip Radford** of West Bagborough Taunton

**Class 9 Video (Open Subject)**

- 1st The Quiet Return \*  
by Recording Club of Cardiff
- 2nd Bath Tub Race \*  
by Mark Rigier of Poole Dorset
- 3rd Westbourne Xmas Lights \*  
by Mark Rigier of Poole Dorset

**Class 10 Multimedia**

- 1st Rallye Sunseeker 2010 \*  
by Mark Rigier of Poole Dorset
- 2nd Notting Hill Carnival 2009 \*  
by Mark Rigier of Poole Dorset
- 3rd No entry available

\* Notes on International entries marked \*

The International (IARC/CIMES ) has only one class representing both Documentary and Reportage whereas we have two distinct classes.

Therefore "Blind Organists", winner of the Documentary Class, will represent this class and "Nightlight " a close 2nd in both this class and the vacant International vote by council members, will take the resulting spare slot.



# Four Wheels and an Elephant in Kenya

**David Tombs**

The first part of a combined recording expedition to Madagascar and Kenya by Nigel Tucker and David Tombs was told in the **2004 Spring** edition of the Journal (see page 11).

Here, David picks up the story as of the time of leaving Madagascar on 1st December 1988 when he and Nigel are desperate to get moving.

## **1st December:**

1000 hrs. Embassy still has no clearance for our recordings and equipment. Hubert, our faithful driver, says he knows who might help and we rush off to some office in town where a bossy lady comes with us to the other side of town to the Ministry of the Interior - "Sorry, clearance will take two days normally". We haven't got two days or even two hours.

Lady then negotiates and, for a 'special fee', the man there can authorise clearance papers etc – relief. We happily pay up (what else could we do?) and have a bit of lunch at the Hilton, and give our thanks to Hubert at the airport, for all his very valued help and driving.

Another hell of a day but we eventually reach Hotel Boulevard in Nairobi at 2300 hrs but that's not the end for we are now to spend a week recording at the northern edge of the Serengeti Plain. It seems, and maybe so, that at least a third of our time has been spent in packing, unpacking, officialdom and travel.

## **2nd December:**

Our unpacking and repacking completed by 0830 hrs. Today we travel to one of the waterhole lodges in a game park, some 3½ hours drive to the south of Nairobi. We have a car and driver/guide but the car is too small for all our things, hence the repacking and the limitation of what we can take.

The ride from Nairobi is delayed by the usual office and agent problems but, after lunch, we eventually get moving in a rattle-box of a car on the way to Kilaguni Lodge, on the northern edge of the Serengeti Plain, with good views of Mount Kilimanjaro, we are told. The road is very poor: there are a large number of potholes as well as the ride being akin to a roller-coaster in its unevenness.

Three hours later we come to a dust track road with entry gates and, by dark, we reach the lodge and lever ourselves from the Suzuki 900cc rattle box (they should have kept with motorbikes!).

## **3rd December:**

0700 – 1530 hrs spent recording Mongoose in an area close to canteens and kitchens etc. Frustrating with all the noises but the canteen throws out food scraps on a small hill at the back and that is why the Mongoose come to the area. We also record anything that utters a sound in the gardens at the front and sides of the lodge and also about the tracks near the lodge

## **4th December:**

After recording some early morning (dawn) atmosphere from just outside my room, Nigel and I went out into the bush and there we found good material and, from the book we have, Nigel managed to identify most of the species we recorded. We worked on until 1300 hrs, by which time it was very hot. Back at the lodge we take cool beer and some lunch.

In the evening we go in the rattlebox out to the bush again to record sounds at dusk. The day has been successful and both R-DAT recording machines have performed excellently.

## **5th December:**

Our driver tells us he had a nasty bout of malaria last night and he and some other drivers were on their way through the park to the nearest hospital when an Elephant got in their way and, trying to avoid it, they rolled the car over twice. Fortunately, they seem to be OK but the car is not (a good job too, I say) and the police are here - four of them.

There seems to be some problem concerning insurance, or was it the driving in the park after dark (which is forbidden), but our driver gets around to asking us for 2000 Kenyan shillings (about £60) which will, apparently, make the police report run in his favour! With some hesitation and a strong degree of reluctance, I pay up.

Being also a little concerned about how to get back to Nairobi now that the car is definitely an unusable wreck, we make enquiries. There is no telephone at Kilaguni, only a radio transmitter for communication and the radio operator confirms that a replacement car is on its way.

Apart from these problems a worthwhile amount of recording has been done and in near-perfect weather – clear skies and 30 Celsius or more (my kind of weather!). We continue to take last minute opportunities to record anything we can around the lodge before packing for the return to Nairobi tomorrow.

## **6th December:**

There is another car, a good one, with a fresh driver to take us back to Nairobi and the ride is more comfortable than on the ride to the Lodge in that little old rattle box, now probably only about 3 feet high, following its misfortune!

## **7th December:**

With little hope of getting my £60 we leave Nairobi for an 8½ hrs flight on a B.A. 747 for Heathrow.

I arrive home in Bristol at 2200 hrs - and that was the easy bit!

**David**

# Exploring Coastlines with the DolphinEar Pro

## Miles Bowe

I've had experience using a hydrophone previous to the DolphinEar Pro with the hand built Jez Riley French hydrophone plugged into a Zoom H2 recorder. This isn't a bad microphone for the price, and I've got some nice recordings from it. However I was excited about getting my hands on the society's DolphinEar Pro hydrophone, in the hope of capturing bigger and better things!

I took the hydrophone to a number of locations around Cornwall near the beginning of October. My intention when recording was not specifically to identify any aquatic species, I was mainly interested in capturing underwater sounds and simply experimenting. However I did record the subtle snapping of shrimp in rock pools, and many other sounds that I couldn't identify due to the sound source remaining unseen; and my fundamental lack of knowledge in this area. I recording very loud snapping and popping opposite the boat yard in Mylor, which I would like to know if was again shrimp of some kind.

When recording with the DolphinEar Pro I used a Sound Devices 302 mixer and Fostex FR-2LE recorder. Upon plugging in the microphone at home I was impressed with the high sensitivity, for example I could hear speech from the other side of the room, as well as the very low self-noise. One of the first places I placed the microphone was against the piping of my radiator, doing so immediately transported me into all the plumbing sounds my house has to offer! Indeed the DolphinEar Pro is a very effective contact microphone.

I spent a lengthy period of time sat in a wooded area with the microphone taped against a tree. It was a breezy

morning and the scraping and knocking of the branches was captivating heard in this different way. I intend to explore the internal sounds of trees further at some point, perhaps burying a microphone among the root system.

On another windy day I hooked the microphone underneath wire fencing and captured some very haunting sounds.

It was certainly interesting burying the DolphinEar Pro underneath the sand and waiting for the tide to wash over. Again I sat for a long period of time listening to the distant booming of the waves, and gurgling water, the sunshine also made an appearance making the experience all the more pleasurable!

I should have liked to move further away from the coast, which is constantly dominated by the sound of the waves breaking, however I had no access to a boat unfortunately. Still I explored many coastal and lakeside areas with this microphone, it's fascinating how small bodies of water I came across such as rock pools, and even streams within caves can have their own unique sounds.

My experience of underwater sound recorded with the DolphinEar Pro was certainly enjoyable, I can think of little to no negative points to mention. Aside from turning down the levels or removing your headphones when positioning the microphone, due to very loud sounds you may pick up simply from handling!

In conclusion I would recommend aquatic recording as a deeply fascinating venture, and with the DolphinEar Pro you would certainly be well equipped.

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## La Brenne National Park, France

### Gerard Grant

Seeking a family holiday this spring which would combine opportunities for wildlife recording and cycling, I proposed a trip to France. The area called La Brenne looked potentially well suited to both. It is situated in central France, about 7 hours easy drive from the port of St. Malo on the northern French coast, or a two-hour train journey from Paris (to Chateauroux). It covers an area around 25 miles in diameter, although the portion of special interest is concentrated in half this area.

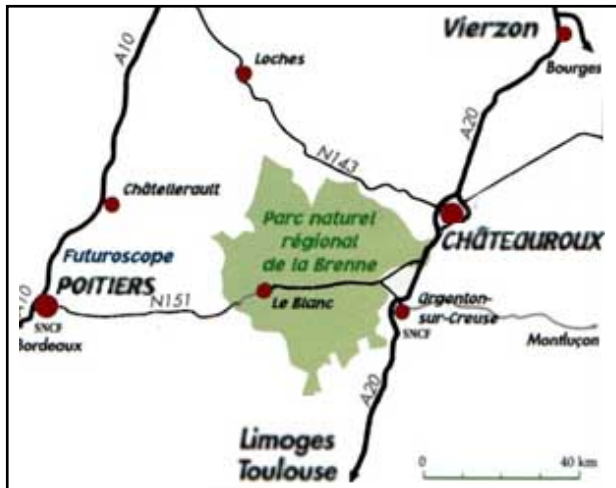
La Brenne is very flat and holds many *étangs*, or small lakes. The lakes, which are said to number over a thousand, were dug out in the middle ages by monks for fish farming. A few have now been converted to formal wildlife reserves with viewing hides. A number of others are accessible by pathways from the road network which crosses the area. The land comprises a mixture of farmland, scrub, deciduous and conifer woodland. The lakes are concentrated more to the North and West, whilst the extensive Lascombe Forest lies to the North East.

My holiday was planned for the last week of April and first week of May. However, it started a few days late due to volcanic ash. Once I had arrived I enjoyed four days of excellent weather before temperatures plummeted and rain arrived.

The area proved very well endowed with birdlife, with over 260 species occurring of which 150 remain to breed. It also enjoys its own collection of species which may be of particular interest to the British birdwatcher, such as: Black-necked Grebe, Night Heron, Little and Great White Egrets, Purple Heron, many birds of prey (e.g. Black Kite, Montagu's and Marsh Harriers, Honey Buzzard, Short-Toed Eagle, Hobby, Osprey), Quail, Common Crane, Stone Curlew, Black-Winged Stilt, Whiskered Tern, Black Tern, Barn Owl, Nightjar, European Bee-Eater, Hoopoe, Black and Middle-Spotted Woodpeckers, Woodlark, Water Pipit, Nightingale, Black Redstart, Fan-Tailed, Savi's, Cetti's, Icterine, Melodious, and Bonelli's Warblers, Firecrest, Crested Tit, Short-Toed Treecreeper, Red-backed Shrike, Golden Oriole, Serin and Cirl Bunting.

La Brenne also boasts many species of amphibians, mammals, insects and plants (including 36 species of orchid). For the birdwatcher or naturalist the area is well worth a visit and is most unlikely to disappoint. I will not dwell further on the wildlife present, as this is documented on various websites, including:

[http://www.parc-naturelbrenne.fr/english/contenu\\_accueilGB.htm#ancree](http://www.parc-naturelbrenne.fr/english/contenu_accueilGB.htm#ancree) and <http://www.naturetrek.co.uk/wildlife-holidays-in-europe/detailsdb.asp?ID=100>.



The following site gives an account of bird watching trips there in 2003 and 2006 by a British couple. It provides a good example of what one might expect and also includes an annotated species list:

<http://www.forewood.co.uk/labrenne.htm>.

For the recordist, La Brenne provides many recording opportunities. It is also easy to get around. Nowhere is far away and there's a good network of roads through the area. It also presents two challenges. The first is due to the road network itself. There is not much traffic in the area, however the roads, in typical French style, are long and straight. Because the land is flat and offers no obstructions to the sound, any traffic that does pass can be heard for some distance. This problem is somewhat manageable with careful choice of location, though makes recording more difficult at dawn, when the sound tends to travel that much further.

The greater challenge was that, despite making various enquiries beforehand which yielded negative responses, the area lies under a flight path. I was unable to find details of exactly what was flying over and from where. However, all the planes seemed to be moving in the same direction (south-south east) and were still climbing to cruising altitude. I speculated that it was a flight path from Paris to perhaps West Africa and Spain / Portugal.

A passing plane would disturb a recording for around 4 minutes. The first plane flew over at around 6:10 am and then there was a gap for around 30 minutes. One then had a further 15 minutes before planes started more regularly around 7 am. The daytime offered some gaps, and then the evening schedule was pretty heavy from around 6:30 pm onwards. For example, although I was able to watch and listen to Nightjar from close quarters on two consecutive evenings, with first-rate views of the

display flight, this otherwise excellent opportunity to record the birds was ruled out because of a succession of flights around dusk.

Given the profusion of birds, the aeroplane situation was especially frustrating. One particular bird made up for this, however. The week I arrived (the last week of April) it seemed was "nightingale week", and it was as though a nightingale seemed to be singing from every thicket. In fact, not just one, but often two and sometimes three birds could be heard singing in close proximity. One was able to record unbroken song from around 5 am till the first plane flew over (just before dawn at 6:20 am). The birds were already singing at 5 am, so presumably started much earlier, however the recordist was not able to mobilise himself to find out as he was still jet-lagged from the trip there.

During the first week of the holiday, we stayed at a *gîte* (holiday cottage) at La Chaume, just outside Ronsay, which made a good base for the *étangs*. The place was compact but comfortable and had internet access. The proprietor is available on +33 (0) 254 376574 or at: [michelechatillon@wanadoo.fr](mailto:michelechatillon@wanadoo.fr) (although does not speak English).

For the second week, we moved to a *gîte* further to the East at Perron, near Méobecq. This was located in a large series of farm buildings and included access to the farm's own *étang*. The accommodation was very spacious, the proprietor spoke good English and was most accommodating - contact via Gîte de France, Indre on +33 (0) 254 275861. This location was selected for its access to the adjoining forest. Both *gîtes* are recommended.

One contact who proved very helpful was Tony Williams. He is British but has lived in La Brenne for many years and works in the Park and notably guides birdwatching parties. He can be contacted at the Park offices (*Maison du Parc*) on +33 (0) 254 281213 or via his direct line +33 (0) 254 281104 if at his desk. His extensive knowledge of the birds of the area has recently been extended to encompass the impact of planes on recording prospects. For this he is indebted to a visiting recordist who shared his reflections on the subject with him! He mentioned that another recordist was in the area in April, and had also informed him of the air traffic problem. Perhaps another WSRS member?

In summary, the area provides some outstanding wildlife, but recording has limitations if you want recordings which are completely free from background noise. So, if you are looking for a wildlife holiday with some recording opportunities thrown in, La Brenne is certainly worth visiting. If you want uninterrupted, heavy duty recording sessions, then you may leave frustrated. For me, it was worth the visit just for the nightingales. And, for those interested, the area also proved excellent for cycling, which was one of the best ways to explore it.

I would be glad to provide further specific information to anyone requiring it. A visit during an eruption of an Icelandic volcano (with an accompanying closure of air space) would provide excellent opportunities. Unfortunately, I missed such an opportunity by just one week.



# Wildlife Sound Recording in Northern India with Chris Watson April 2009

**Gordon Edgar**

## Introduction

I never imagined that I would travel to faraway India at my stage in life, yet somehow, I found myself alone in the darkness, taking in the sounds of the night in the Indian jungle; an exhilarating experience! I had been lured to the sub-continent on a specialised Wildeye expedition, conceived by Piers Warren. Most readers will know that Wildeye trains wildlife film-makers and that both Piers and Chris Watson are longstanding supporters of WSRS.

India is a fascinating country from every perspective and given all there is to see, there is a lot to write about. However, I will focus on our specialised subject and steer clear of abstractions about the culture and spirit of the country. Having set my theme, I will try not to digress too often.

## The group

We met up expectantly in the departure lounge at Heathrow, an eclectic group of eco-tourists that included several old friends from WSRS. I cannot profile them all, but suffice to say that they were a talented and companionable group. It is fair to say that we were well equipped for the mission, laden with 21st century equipment and no pre-digital technology to be seen. Clearly, this was a serious expedition!

## Flight and Airport security

Long-haul trips inevitably begin and end with tedious journeys that are best forgotten, but it is relevant in this forum, to mention a little contretemps I had with airport security at Heathrow. I was hardly surprised when the scanner operator referred my luggage for a hand-search. The supervisor was called and my PP3 batteries were confiscated although they did not challenge my considerable inventory of AA rechargeables. I was a bit miffed as I needed the aforementioned batteries to power my bat detector but ironically, I was able to purchase replacements in the airside departure area. It turns out that PP3s with their press stud connectors are favoured by bomb makers.

## Transfer

The journey from Delhi across the Gangetic plain to the foothills was quite a white knuckle ride. The vehicles have a hard life and I witnessed allelomimesis at close range but surprisingly and against the odds, I did not witness a single collision or traffic accident! However, road transfer is not in my brief and I will skip the details but take a tip from me... Do not try to 'go-it-alone' in a hire-car; driving in India is not for the faint-hearted!

Back 'on message', I started my bird watching campaign through the coach window. As expected, vultures were conspicuous by their absence and it common knowledge

that around 40 million Asian vultures have succumbed to kidney failure after ingesting the veterinary drug diclofenac in livestock carcasses. Incredibly, 95% had died before scientists worked out the cause of the problem. I hope they are not lost forever, and diclofenac is being replaced with a safer alternative called meloxicam. The vultures' fate hangs in the balance and come what may, it will be a long time before vulture numbers show signs of recovery.

Vultures and kites play a valuable ecological role scavenging carcasses and fortunately, the latter are less susceptible to the toxic side effects of diclofenac and seem to have prospered with the demise of the vultures. Apparently, stray dogs have benefited most but I was astonished at the phenomenal numbers of Black Kites around the rubbish tips in Delhi; there were thousands of them! Quite a spectacle!

As an aside, the decline of the vultures has led to a crisis for India's Parsi community. It is against their Zoroastrian faith to burn their dead or float them down-river, as they believe these practices pollute the environment. Traditionally, they disposed of corpses by leaving them on specially built towers to be consumed by vultures. These funeral rituals seem gruesome to westerners but clearly, they are based on sound ecological practice. The Parsis are supporting captive-breeding programmes but meanwhile, they are having to compromise their beliefs and adopt other arrangements.

## Corbett National Park and Tiger Reserve

Our destination was the Corbett National Park, Himalayan Indian's greatest expanse of wilderness and first the basic facts and geography of the location...

There have been numerous confusing name and administrative boundary changes and the geography is rather complicated. As I write, the reserve is spread over several districts in the recently designated Hill State of Uttarakhand, formerly part of Uttar Pradesh. Most of the Park lies in the Shivalik foothills, which are the first and lowest range north of the plains. The area has been protected since 1936 and indeed was the very first National Park in the sub-continent, or even the whole of Asia.

In 1957, it was renamed as Corbett National Park, in memory of Jim Corbett and more recently, Project Tiger, was launched here in 1973. Project Tiger is India's ambitious conservation programme to save the tiger and its habitat.

## Preparations

A 'pilgrimage' to India is something to get excited about and as I had plenty of notice, I tried to prepare myself with some homework. Unfortunately, my researches did not go well and I could not find a large-scale map of the area, showing our camp and the local villages.

It was my ambition to document a good list of vocal species with sound recordings and there was no shortage of trip reports on the Surfbirds website. However, I soon noticed that all the reports related to winter visits and the impressive species lists included numerous altitudinal migrants from the Greater Himalayas.

I bought a dyslexia-inducing bird guide to Northern India but how could I ever learn all those new species from a book? Also, I failed to find a comprehensive sound guide and I only located a few reference samples to learn before departure. Inevitably, I was woefully incompetent on arrival and overwhelmed with unfamiliar voices.

I thought I knew a bit about India although in retrospect, my knowledge was highly selective. I had a 1940s' childhood and stories about India were part of my heritage. My idiosyncratic ideas were coloured by the writings of Jim Corbett and Kipling and I could recite Gunga Din and of course, I knew all the stories from Jungle Book. One of my favourites was the tale of Rikki-tikki-tavi and his epic fight with the dangerous Krait. Incidentally, I used to drink pints of IPA, but that hardly counts as authentic training; in fact, I did not realise the Indian connection when I was younger.

### **Camp Forktail Creek**

After a long drive, we finally arrived expectantly at our destination for my real introduction to Indian wildlife. The Forktail Creek runs down a wooded ravine in the Shivalik Hills and lies in the extensive buffer zone outside the Tiger Reserve proper. The name derives from the forktail birds that visit in the winter. They are striking wagtail-like 'altitudinal' migrants from higher elevations and alas, were long gone before we arrived.

It was near the village of Mohan, where the legendary Jim Corbett stalked and shot the dreaded 'Mohan Man-eater' in 1936. Funnily enough, none of the others remembered that far back! Camp Forktail Creek, our base for the expedition was located on a five-acre site on an abandoned grassland clearing surrounded by deciduous Sal forest (*Shorea robusta*). The camp was beautifully secluded, overlooking the wooded ravine of the creek and is a bit special. It is the only jungle camp in the area and international birders rate it above the well known 'Backwoods Camp' in Goa. It was founded by Ritish Suri who runs the establishment together with his wife Minakshi and they are steadily upgrading the facilities. Ritish is an expert all-round naturalist and knew all the answers to our wildlife queries.

The original canvas safari tents are being replaced and I was allocated one of the comfortable new chalets, doubtless a concession to my elderly status and frail condition. My cabin was next to the 'waterhole', an artificial pond that harboured a few Skipper frogs and attracted numerous species to drink, including the resident sounder of wild pigs.

As already mentioned, my childhood upbringing harks back to the 1940s and 1950s and the word camping revived memories of scouting in cramped tents. We would spend the first day digging latrines and the rest of the week filling them in. Accordingly, my preparations

included watching survival programmes by the likes of Ray Mears and 'Bear' Grylls. Needless to say, times have changed and Camp Forktail Creek is a fully serviced tourist facility where we were pampered by Ritish & Minakshi and all their hardworking staff. Although, close to nature, we did not have to go foraging or fend for ourselves. True there was no electricity, but lanterns were provided when the sun went down and the camp generator was running every evening for that all-important battery recharging.

### **Lantana**

My cabin was surrounded by dense clumps of shrub verbenas (*Lantana camara*), and the flowers were attracting butterflies and iridescent Purple Sunbirds (*Nectarinia asiatica*). Little did I realise that this species was an invasive weed, native to tropical America and has overrun large swathes of Corbett, degrading the ecosystem. Evidently, the flowers produce useful nectar but the leaves are mildly toxic and are rejected by browsers. Control is proving difficult and this alien is now a serious nuisance.

### **Recording conditions in camp**

Recording conditions were quite good and the noise floor was generally low. There was no backing track of traffic roar and aircraft noise that we get in England. In early April, we were between the seasonal monsoons and planetary winds were light. It was flat calm at dawn and dusk but as the days warmed up, the warmth of the sun generated a diurnal breeze and consequent canopy rustle. If something is too good to be true, there is probably a catch and sure enough, I encountered a novel and unexpected problem...

Technically speaking, the vegetation was moist jungle but in the dry summer season, the Sal trees were spontaneously shedding leaves. Birds in the canopy were constantly dislodging more that made quite a noise as they fell. The ubiquitous parakeets were the worst offenders, hence the sobriquet, 'flying secateurs'.

During the heat of the day, the entire forest crackled as it rained falling leaves. Despite being a natural sound, I found it distracting and reminiscent of the crackling on an old shellac gramophone record. Casual listeners would not appreciate the cause and would assume that they were hearing artefacts. The forest floor was covered with a thick carpet of large, dead leaves making it impossible for any large animal to move about quietly. Later this worked in my favour when I captured a series of foot-stamping alarms from a Chital buck.

The camp itself was a hive of activity and the staff worked long hours for our benefit. However, it was easy to walk out of camp and straight into the adjacent forest to get away from human disturbance. I had some good sessions before breakfast in ideal conditions outside the boundary wall. Evenings in camp were noisy when the generator was running and people talking round the campfire until midnight. Moreover, there was no respite from the resident Large-tailed Nightjars (*Caprimulgus macrurus*), seriously noisy birds!



## **Skipper Frogs**

My bungalow was near the amphibian pond already mentioned and the Skipper Frogs, (*Euphlyctis cyanophlyctis*) would call at night and the males have two vocal sacs to amplify the sound. They were an obvious target for our group and we all recorded them conventionally and underwater with hydrophones to prime our lists. Curiously, Skipper Frogs have the ability to leap clear of the water from a floating position.

## **Chris Watson**

The trip was billed as 'Sound Recording with Chris Watson' and the course was 'tutor driven'. Students were shown the basic fieldcraft and techniques of recording on location, along the lines of the residential courses run at Wildeye's Whitwell Hall in Norfolk.

Chris brought a lot of equipment and the demonstrations included our standard two-channel stereo, with microphones set up in the forest and cabled back to a Sound Devices stereo pre-amp and four-channel Sound Devices 744T recorder.



More advanced 'surround sound' techniques included, four DPA 4060 'omnis' in a square for four-channel surround sound, and M-S-M recording with back-to-back M&S arrays using 2 Sennheiser MKH8040 cardioids + one MKH30 fig-of-eight.

Now Chris is arguably the best in the business and he was happy to share his experience and expertise. He answered all our questions with unfailing patience and good humour, rather like playing synchronous chess against a dozen opponents.

## **Bonding**

We all had our own agendas and I had not come all this way to laze on the sun-loungers. I am passionate, nay obsessive about my hobby and my mission was to make species recordings. I am not really comfortable with herd life and there is no denying that I was the most single-minded eccentric in the group. I am not against teamwork in principle but I knew I (we) had to 'sequesterate' and forsaking all others, I dodged all the coaching sessions

and escorted walks, not because had nothing to learn, but I was working against the clock and there was no time to lose. Doubtless, my fellow travellers thought I was a sociopathic 'loner', but in mitigation, I bonded well with the pigs, more of which later. My dogged single-mindedness did produce results and I returned with 90 species recordings for the archives.... I wonder if I will ever get them identified?



## **Getting interactive**

Nightlife was hotel-based as they say in the holiday brochures, and on my first night in camp, I was jet-lagged and could not sleep. After everyone had settled down, I slipped out past my sleeping roommate and wandered off into the starlit night.

The darkness exposes our limitations and I loitered with intent for a while, absorbing the unfamiliar sounds of an Indian night. My senses were reeling but I was in my element at last. I was working my way towards a calling nightjar when I realised that I was not alone. I had made contact with the locals; a heart stopping moment! I stood very still, awaiting developments and found myself facing a defensive semi-circle of Wild Pigs (*Sus scrofa*). Clearly, I had met my match and I wondered if I would ever see my loved ones again.

We eyed one another warily in a mutual risk assessment and I breathed easier when I noticed that there were no little 'porklings' in tow as I well knew that Wild Pigs have a feisty reputation. After a pregnant pause, I decided to show my manly qualities and take the initiative. 'Shoo! Go home you naughty piggies!', I said. Inexplicably, that failed to impress them and true to form, they stood their ground.

It was time for plan B, which never fails, although admittedly, I have not tried to fend off a full-frontal tiger. I took a step back and started humming, 'Easy girls...hummm...haaah...hummm ...' That did the trick, and the pigs accepted that I was harmless; we all relaxed and went about our business and I went on to secure an acceptable recording of Oriental Scops Owl (*Otus sunia*) and eventually returned to my bed unscathed. Later, I discovered that we were living cheek-by-jowl as the sounder spent the heat of the day in cover, not 20 metres behind by cabin using the amphibian pond as their water-hole. Every evening they would trot past my open door,

sometimes pausing to look in and grunt. Evidently, my regular scent marking was working effectively and they recognised a kindred spirit.

My first encounter caused a frisson of excitement but I often wandered the site after dark and soon we became acquainted and coexisted peacefully. I even claim that we had developed a working rapport although I did not tell my human companions about my dalliances. I certainly never felt that I was operating behind enemy lines. There were no tantrums and I became so blasé that I did not bother to prime my clockwork panic alarm. That said, the pigs did not get on with the camp's 'Bhutia' sheepdogs and would set them barking every evening when they came foraging around the camp kitchens. Enough said!

### **Chrono-biology**

Perhaps this is a convenient moment to mention en passant the realities of chrono-biology. My ageing body clock malfunctions at the best of times and I always spend my spring trips 'out of synch' with the daylight and my hapless companions. The quiet of the night was prime time for recording and in camp, I had to wait until midnight for the humans to settle down. I was usually out on patrol or scent marking between midnight and 1.00 am and again at first light until breakfast. I started around 5.00 am to beat the early staff coming on duty. Doubtless, the other intrepid WSRs die-hards were also doing their rounds although I doubt if anyone else was quite so fanatical.

My internal clock was synchronised to daylight and resented the dislocation of the long-haul journey. You cannot bank extra sleep and ideally, I would have rested during of the day, but for the organised game drives. The result was that I was always jet lagged like a shift worker on their day off. My plight was partly my own making, but one must suffer for one's art! After all, I had not come all this way to enjoy myself!

### **The National Park and Restrictions on visitors**

The Corbett Reserve is a wildlife sanctuary rather than a theme park and visitors are rightly excluded from the vast core area. However, it is undoubtedly a tourist attraction and visitors are only allowed into certain designated areas where they are managed and kept out of mischief; not that I would ever get in harm's way, would I?

We were shielded from the bureaucratic problems of entry permits but everyone had to abide by the safety rules. This was tiger country and lest we forget, they are dangerous. We could not leave the vehicles except at designated picnic sites and we were always accompanied by park rangers. Obviously, the rules were necessary but it made sound recording difficult and I was constantly frustrated.

Losing a tourist would be bad publicity but once a tiger had killed a human it would be deemed to be dangerous and have to be shot. Of course, the purpose of a tiger reserve is to conserve the species.

At this juncture, I will relate the infamous David Hunt affair...

### **The David Hunt affair**

Back in camp one evening, Chris Watson replayed a BBC programme that he had worked on, and was first broadcast in 2004. Entitled, 'Bill Oddie in Tiger Country', it was filmed hereabouts and featured the true story of the death of David Hunt. David was a bird-watcher who was leading a tour in 1985 when he took a crazy risk to get a photograph of a tiger at point blank range.

I can relate to that as I was given a similar life script. Somehow, I have the curious belief that I am invincible behind my parabola and I fully expect to die with my boots on, rather than as a bed-blocker in some geriatric ward. Perhaps I do need a minder, after all! Tourists are protected nowadays, but the local people are still at risk. There have been incidents at Corbett where, forestry workers, mahouts or staff at the complex have been mauled. Elsewhere too, local people are often killed by tigers, particularly in the mangrove forests of the Sunderbans in the Ganga Delta.

### **Recording from the jeeps**

Our daily game viewing excursions into the National Park were always eventful and the photographers among us were busy. Recording sound was not quite 'mission impossible', but frustrating with many missed opportunities. I decided swiftly that I would have to make the best of it or return home with empty memory cards. My simple plan was to grab whatever [recordings] I could and then clean them up laboriously back at home. I am nothing without my PC and my beloved 'undo' function!

I am still slugging it out with rechargeables (roll on fuel cell technology) and I opted to stay powered up for long periods, discharging several sets every day. I was having a personal battle with my kit, as some insiders know (inexplicable polarity problems) and I was often 'caught with my amps down'. Funnily enough, I was always first in the queue in the unseemly scramble at the generator every evening. However, it pays to be ready at the opportune moment and I did capture a trickle of samples, including some 'exclusives', although admittedly, some files required extensive cleaning.





## **Day 4 Bijrani Zone**

Our first foray into the Park proper, was a full day trip to the Bijrani Tourism Zone. After an early start, we left Camp in a convoy of open-topped 'jeeps' (Maruti-Suzuki Gypsies). They were heavily laden with eager eco-tourists, our camera equipment and even the occasional microphone, not to mention our resident guides.

We entered the Park at the Amadanda Gate, near Ringora Village where we were joined by the obligatory escort of park rangers for a traditional game-viewing safari along a network of jeep tracks. We had not travelled far when we came upon a pair of laconic Oriental Honey Buzzards (*Pernis ptilorhynchus*) excavating a bees' nest. What a treat! They were not camera-shy and posed obligingly for the photographers although they remained silent. This confiding behaviour would be unthinkable in England. I know European Honey Buzzards in Norfolk and I cannot imagine them letting me anywhere near them.

Moments later, the rangers spotted a White-rumped Shama and I was delighted to record three strophes of its rich, melodious song, which I cleaned up later. I knew at the time, that this species was the subject of Ludwig Koch's first ever bird recording, made in 1889 and I was only too thankful that my equipment was more portable than his Eddison phonograph. By coincidence, I was listening to Sean Street's radio presentation one evening when editing and we were told that the original wax cylinder survives to this day, preserved in the BBC Sound archives.

I cannot list every sighting that day but some of the larger mammals were highly visible and habituated to vehicles. We had great, close views of Sambar browsing, a herd of Chital, Wild Boars and Rhesus Macaques, to name but the mammals. The abundant bird life was more difficult to see in the canopy and I had to rely on the rangers for identifications. Of the four species of deer in the park, the Chital or Spotted Deer, *Axis Axis*, were common and graceful creatures; with their good looks, they were reminiscent of Bambi in the Disney films!

I doggedly recorded from the jeeps at every opportunity and I had a few successes that day including a White-throated Kingfisher at the Crocodile Pool and a reasonable sequence of Coppersmith Barbet. The latter was one of my target species, well-known throughout the sub-continent for its monotonous call, said to recall the tapping of a small hammer on metal. The persistence of the calling rises with the temperature and it is one of the hot weather irritations of India.

## **Our first Tiger**

It was a long day with seldom a dull moment and by late afternoon, all the jeeps were returning to the gate when word spread of a Tiger sighting. It had been spotted entering cover and within minutes, the patch was surrounded. It was like a drive-in cinema with all the assembled vehicles! Our time was running out, when a large, muscular male Bengal Tiger *Panthera tigris* emerged and centre stage, nonchalantly crossed the track, seemingly oblivious to the watching crowd. I have seen plenty of captive tigers before but nothing compares with seeing

one in the wild, where it belongs; truly awe-inspiring and a fitting finale to our day. There is no denying the aura surrounding them!

It struck me at the time that we were the only foreigners present and that the huge majority of visitors that day were domestic tourists, presumably from Delhi or the plains. Doubtless, the glamorous tiger was the big attraction, but it is heartening to think that interest in wildlife is not just a western concern. In fact, Hindu tradition is more sympathetic to wildlife and conservation than most cultures and I will return to this theme later.

## **Day 5 Dhikala Range**

The Dhikala range is the main tourist zone in Corbett and the destination for our next foray, a multi-day trip with overnight accommodation at a Forest Rest House. After another early start, we entered the Reserve again through the main Dhangari Gate, just a few kilometres from camp. Incidentally, there was an impressive new Interpretative Centre at Dhangarhi that was crowded with domestic Indian day-trippers when we were there.

It was another morning in the jeeps, viewing wildlife on another stage with plenty of subjects vying for attention. As usual, sound recording was problematically, but I was delighted to make an 'exclusive' recording of Chital alarms. Our jeep stopped near a party of deer in a wooded ravine. The lead buck gave a few alarm calls followed by a long series of foot-stamping alarms, on the thick carpet of dead leaves and I was able to capture all this from the overloaded jeep. Surprisingly, the file needed little cleaning and I was pleased to add this to my collection of foot-stamping cervids recorded in England.

As on our previous game drive the deer and wild pigs were conspicuous and habituated to vehicles and we were entertained by troupes of Common Langur Monkeys and Rhesus Macaques, always good performers!

I was always struggling but I did secure several species recordings worth keeping, including Green Magpie, Great Barbet, Ashy Bulbul and a Drongo imitating a Green Magpie. The jeep tracks passed through stands of dense Sal forest and by mid-morning, canopy rustle effectively ended recording.

## **Ramganga River**

Our route took us past a stretch of the river known as 'High Bank', where the Ramganga River flows through a gorge. It was a vantage point and we had good views of two local specialities, namely the rare fish-eating Gharials *Gavialis gangeticus* and impressive Mahseer *Barbus Tor putitora*, in the river below. The legendary Mahseer is one of the world's larger freshwater fish.

The Gharial is an unusual type of crocodile, adapted to life in the cold water of fast flowing rivers. It was on the brink of extinction but was reintroduced here and the numbers are steadily building up. To date, over 3,000 captive reared animals have been released into the wild although the reintroduction programme has suffered a few setbacks. Recently more than 100 gharials have died in the Chambal River from heavy metal poisoning and the species is still critically endangered.

The long, narrow snout is distinctive and mature males develop a bulbous excrescence on the tip called a 'ghara', after the Indian word meaning 'pot'. I mention these details because this growth has a bio-acoustical significance, being used to generate a resonant hum, and to make bubbles during mating rituals.

### **Dhikala Tourist Complex**

We had lunch at the main Dhikala tourist complex, strategically situated in the Patli Dun Valley and close to the huge reservoir formed by the Kalagarh dam. It is surrounded by vast grasslands known locally as 'chaurs' or 'maidans' and the complex offers panoramic views of the Dhikala chaur, the Phulai chaur, the Ramganga River and the scenic Kanda Ridge to the north. Tourist pressures are high at Dhikala and the compound was surrounded by a solar fence. With the combination of the fence, the convoys of jeeps and the uniformed rangers, it had the air of a military installation. Despite the security, there was always the risk of being mugged by delinquent Rhesus monkeys!

After lunch, it was off again on another game drive through the Dhikala 'chaur'. It was breezy but we saw herds of wild elephants heading for the reservoir and I recorded alarm calls of Hodgson's Bushchat, *Saxicola insignis*, despite the rustling vegetation. The quality was woeful but I kept the clip as a souvenir because the species is rare and is sought after by twitchers. It is a declining, 'restricted range' species, breeding very locally in Mongolia.

### **Gairal**

We had accommodation for two nights at one of the forest rest houses (FRH), originally built during the British administration for forestry officials. Some have been converted to tourist accommodation and of course, the modern tourist sleeps inside a solar powered electric fence. Our Gairal FRH was less crowded than Dhikala and well situated in a quiet corner away from the main jeep tracks on the banks of the river and surrounded by pristine jungle.

Here the Ramganga is a crystal-clear, fast-flowing mountain river near the beginning of its long journey into the Ganga (formerly the Ganges), and eventually into the Bay of Bengal. During the monsoon rains, it is a raging torrent and even when we were there in the dry season it was hardly a babbling brook, despite the low gradient. It was an idyllic spot but the compound was surrounded by the customary fence and there was no escape from the unwanted backing track of river noise. There was a viewing watchtower outside the wire but it was too close to the river for a microphone position.

Without divulging too much information, I suffered a loss of form and was 'off games' that day. I declined the organised jeep rides and opted for a quiet morning near the en suite facilities. Now, being corralled behind a fence with loose vowels, may not sound very promising but I spent a productive day with my back to the river noise, comfortably seated recording through the wire. It was time well spent, with a succession of subjects straying within range. I made several species recordings including decent samples of Peafowl and Green Bee-eater.

On the river frontage, there were steps down to a slow moving backwater and I spent an hour watching a pair of colourful White-throated Kingfishers catching the abundant small fish. They were quite vocal and I did not have to wait long to capture their cackling calls.

### **Hydrophone demonstration**

It was in this calm channel that Chris Watson set up a demonstration with a pair of DPA 8011 hydrophones. We were able to hear the sounds of the underwater world on Chris' SD 744T recorder and those of us with phantom power could connect up and record for ourselves. I was fascinated by the strange sounds although I have no idea what we were listening to; suggestions were fish or invertebrates grazing on algae. Clearly, this is still a new field that will attract a wider following now that hydrophones are freely available.

Also at Gairal, I was pleased to see fireflies for the first time in my life and a passing satellite, not to mention the scary looking 'bullet' (carpenter?) ants collecting water in the toilet. I like to think I am fair-minded but I did not warm to them. Forget the clockwork radio; bring on the clockwork torch!

On a pre-dawn recording session, a pair of Brown Hawk Owls (*Ninox scutulata*) flew right over my head and I was lucky enough to capture their quiet contact calls before they spotted me buried discreetly in a high backed chair. Finally, the electric fence was activated at night. I should mention that the Telinga microphone picked up the pulses at close range but the Sennheiser MKH series seemed to be shielded against this interference.



### **Elephant ride**

Then it was back to the hub at Dhikala for lunch and a late afternoon elephant-back safari. Apparently, the riding elephants are Government owned superannuated civil servants?

In the jungle, we were shown a rotting and putrid Sambar carcass, killed by a tiger. Where are the vultures, when



we need them, I wondered? Also, I can confirm that elephants are martyrs to flatulence; apparently a problem with digestive transit induced by a high volume diet of low-quality vegetable matter.

This was the only time I saw Hog Deer *Axis porcinus* and I was hoping for a recording, to add to my cervid collection. Needless to say, they remained silent. They are not gregarious 'herd' animals although they were quite numerous in the chaur. Apparently, they have a whistling call and a warning bark, but unusually, no rutting call.

### Termites

As I already mentioned, Corbett has been protected for a long time and the eco-systems are in good shape. The bio-diversity is high and the area supports a good range of predators and raptors at the top of the food chains. Of course, there is a healthy population of the apex predator, the iconic Bengal Tiger *Panthera tigris*.

I was new to the tropics and I could hardly miss the ubiquitous and conspicuous termite mounds. I did a bit of reading and it turns out that termites are one of the most abundant animals on earth, thriving in the tropical regions. They are a key species in food chains, recycling cellulose and litter on the forest floor. In turn, they are preyed on by numerous higher species.

The industrious termites are subterranean nest builders and need to dig for water. Everything they dig is brought up to surface, and builds up their mounds. I was intrigued to read that soil analysis of the mounds can be used to locate gold and other mineral deposits at deeper levels. The technique is known as 'geo-zoology' and apparently is cheaper than drilling for samples.

Generally speaking, Hindus are kind to animals although I doubt if they are too keen on termites in their house timbers and indeed these insects are a serious agricultural pest.

### Day 8 Patharia

After an early start, we were driven to the Patharia ridge behind camp for breakfast, where we could look back down on our Forktail Creek Camp. Climbing steadily into the foothills, it was quite chilly in the early dawn and the landscape had a different character; we were in the lower Himalayas and a different vegetation zone.

Connoisseurs of scenery were well catered for and we had a picnic breakfast on an airy vantage point at 900 metres on the Patharia ridge, looking down on settlements and terraced cultivations in the valley. Our base camp looked in significant far below.

During the breakfast stop, we recorded from a path looking down into the wooded valley. There was plenty to record as waves of mixed flocks passed by. Himalayan Bulbuls *Pycnonotus leucogenys* were common, as were flocks of Rosy Minivets *Pericrocotus roseus*. The Madaar or Coral trees *Erythrina indica* were in bloom and their striking scarlet-red flowers were attracting feeding parties of Slaty-headed Parakeets *Psittacula himalayana*.

Like all its relatives, this species is noisy and the musical

'too, too' notes are distinctive. Incidentally, it is the only altitudinal migrant among the psittacids, descending to the valleys in winter.

### Lohachaur Range

After our breakfast picnic, we drove north to the Durga Devi Gate on the north-eastern side of the Tiger Reserve and entered the Mandal Valley and the hilly Lohachaur Range. Here there were fewer visitors being furthest from the populated plains and in the buffer zone outside the National Park there were fewer restrictions on visitors, meaning you can explore on foot. The hill slopes were covered with moist subtropical montane forest and drained by fern-laden streams. The area was particularly rich in bird life and is a haven for Himalayan species not found at lower altitude in April. For example, I recorded several parties of noisy Laughing Thrushes.

We had a picnic lunch at the Lohachaur Forest Rest House in an exquisite setting, now surrounded by the obligatory electric fence to deter the local wild elephants. After lunch, I escaped through the gate and spend a blissful hour recording a Brainfever Bird *Cuculus varius* and various barbets in good recording conditions. There is no disputing that these common species are well endowed vocally!

I made plenty of recordings that day from the jeep including Wild Elephants, *Elephas maximus*, trumpeting and I was able to salvage most of them. This area would be ideal for a longer expedition and I would have liked to spend a few nights at the FRH although I did not see a generator. The Mandal River is one of the main tributaries of the Ramganga and on the way back, we had a break at the confluence at Domunda, where a Crested Serpent Eagle, *Spilornis cheela*, posed for photos and called obligingly for my microphone.

### The penultimate day

After an action packed week of organised excursions, we had a free day in camp before the long drive back to Delhi. Of course, there is more to life than sound recording and the sane members of the group went to broaden their horizons in the provincial town of Ramnagar or the Garjiya Devi Temple, perched on a huge rock in the River Kosi.

Sightseeing and shopping are not my style and inexplicably, I was still short of clean sound recordings. Somehow, I was drawn to the forest again and I found the solitude I was seeking. By now, I was attuned to the local barbets and parakeets and I enjoyed my best sessions of the trip in tranquil conditions, apart from occasional systemic borborygmus, that is! True, I missed out on some interesting cultural experiences and I regret that I did not visit Bhakrahot village close by. However, my calling could not be denied and I had a preternatural urge to fill my memory cards.

That day there was another option available to the able bodied; namely a long walk past the village and up to the ridge at Patharia. Regrettably, that muscle-powered adventure was beyond me but a couple of our hard men made the journey.

I did not want to leave Camp Forktail but sadly then, it was 'game over' except to keep a final tryst with my nocturnal friends, and enjoy some precious moments under the stars; just when we were building trust and understanding. The pigs knew me well by now for I had been scent marking around their lair. The rest of the group may be surprised to read this as coyly, I had kept my holiday romance a secret. I will not bore you with the long journey home but I returned with full CF cards and lasting memories. The trip was literally, the experience of a lifetime.

### **Pressures and encroachment**

Later back home, I had time to reflect. I do not want to get carried away with abstractions but it is fitting to end my musings with a few words on future prospects.

Corbett is a substantial reserve and Himalayan Indian's greatest expanse of wilderness. It is protected and with responsible management, its future looks safe. Furthermore, Hindu tradition is sympathetic to wildlife and conservation and many Indians do care about nature. That said, poaching is a continuing problem and unsurprisingly, marauding animals are being killed by angry farmers. Conservation can work and Corbett Tiger Reserve is a success story, with the sanctuary supporting abundant and diverse wildlife with most of the ecosystems and food chains intact.

Against that however, environmental issues have to be set against the pressures of the modern world and there is no denying that India faces plenty of pressing problems. The burgeoning population and rapidly developing economy will inevitably increase the pressure on wildlife and their habitats. Corbett is surrounded by an extensive buffer zone but even here, there is a large human population needing living space. At present, there are 92 villages on the very boundary, housing 66,000 people and 45,000 head of livestock. All these people need water, firewood, fodder and land to cultivate and there is likely to be more encroachment. Sadly, conflict seems inevitable and even on our first day in camp, Bhakrakhot village lost a precious buffalo to a marauding tiger.

Taking other examples, hundreds of Steppe Eagles and vultures were accidentally poisoned at the Ranikhet rubbish tip in 2006. It was not wanton or deliberate, but collateral damage caused by dumping toxic waste. And even as I write in July 2010, news has arrived of more trouble at the precious Ringora colony of White-backed Vultures. Corbett is a precious sanctuary for wildlife and let us hope that its habitats and ecosystems can be conserved for posterity.

### **Miscellaneous**

My musings are not the full story of this Wildeye trip and other group members travelling in different jeeps had different sightings and experiences. Rumour has it that there is a downside to life in India, but we were pampered tourists and sheltered from the legendary hassles. On our trip, and everything went smoothly, thanks to Ritish and his team. Overall, the trip was action packed and full of interest; the experience of a lifetime and enough to justify the long arduous journey.

It is evident from reading the reports on 'Surfbirds' that independent travel is possible, but it would be much easier to use a specialist ground agent to make the arrangements. Indian bureaucracy is legendary and for example, you cannot just turn up at the Park Gate and buy a permit.

I was fixated on the recording and working from the overcrowded jeeps was problematical, as fellow recordists will understand. The safety restrictions on visitors hampered my style. That said, there were plenty of subjects passing through camp and the Sal forest was close by. If we had more days in camp, I would have explored further afield.

There are three distinct seasons in Himalayan India. Winters are dry and we visited in early April, which is early summer. I came expecting verdant rain forest because the vegetation was categorised as moist jungle. In the event, I found dry forest and we were too late for the winter visitors. Likewise, I formed the impression that many resident species such as the woodpeckers were incubating and we had missed the vocal territorial and courtship rituals.

I am guessing that we would have heard more birdsong a few weeks earlier but missed the wild elephants and tigers. Incidentally, our group saw several tigers including two excellent close range encounters. As it was, there were quite enough potential subjects for all, sound recordists and photographers alike. There is no ideal time to visit a location and presumably, the soundscapes change regularly. In April, we were entertained by several species of barbet in full voice.

I was expecting a fulsome welcome from the local mosquitoes but as it turned out, they were not a problem and I did not shut the windows at night. Likewise, I spent several evenings in the forest and was scarcely troubled by insects. I brought a travelling pharmacy with me and in the event, I hardly used anything. I did not need insect repellent and I stopped taking my anti-malarials as there were no mosquitoes.

I was so busy with the birds that I hardly noticed other groups. I did not make any lists and suffice to say there was a good range of species on offer. I saw no snakes or lizards and apparently the monsoon rains bring out the frogs that are hunted by snakes. I saw plenty of butterflies but few bats or bushcrickets, although I did not look very hard.

Looking at my narrow interest in sound recording, I fared far better in the buffer zone outside the park, where I was free from the safety rules and anyone planning a dedicated recording trip could not better Camp Forktail Creek as a base. Ritish is a keen naturalist and understands our funny ways.

There were fewer irksome safety regulations on the Mandal range which was also a good area for birds. Overnight accommodation was available at the Lohachaur FRH and could be arranged in advance by Ritish. There may have been a generator although I did not spot it and independent travellers arriving without bookings would not be admitted.

Serious globe-trotting birders coming to this part of India usually include a visit to Naini Tal at 2,000 metres in the Kumaon Hills. The town is the erstwhile summer capital of the former United Provinces of British India and the surrounding hills harbour a good range of Himalayan species.

Contact Wildeye at [info@wildeye.co.uk](mailto:info@wildeye.co.uk) for news of future trips as Piers Warren may run this again.

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Photographs by courtesy of Wildeye.co.uk

## The Nagra VI Field Recorder

### Gerard Grant

The Autumn 2008 Journal carried a comprehensive technical review of the Nagra VI digital recorder penned by John Willett. After reading the review and a fair bit of other research (which included a helpful correspondence with John), I purchased such a machine at the end of last year.

My motivation for the purchase was three-fold, namely: my desire to acquire a solid state recorder to replace my DAT recorder; my interest to move towards surround (and eventually ambisonic) recording, initially using the M-S-M technique; and my interest to experiment further with an M-S-M rig in a reflector (although used for stereo). These interests meant looking for a solid state recorder that could handle at least four channels.

My options seemed to come down to either a Nagra VI, Sound Devices 744T or SD 788. The six channel Nagra offers two key features which were deciding factors for me.

Firstly, the Nagra has four mic inputs which can be ganged in any combination(s) and assigned to one volume control. Secondly, the machine allows one to assign one monitoring volume control to an M&S decoded version of channels 1 and 2, and a second monitoring volume control to channel 3 panned to the centre. This latter arrangement allows monitoring of the decoded front M-S and the rear M signals in M-S-M separately, which is also particularly helpful for the accurate alignment of the reflector on a subject when using the rig within it.

The Sound Devices recorders seem to score highly, including amongst WSRS members. However, as far as I could determine, there is no way one can put four mics into the four channel 744T machine under one volume control. The machine only has two mic inputs and it is necessary to buy a separate mixer for the third and fourth channels.



The eight input / twelve track 788 can be used with four mics, but again it is not clear if more than two mics can be ganged. The controls are relatively small unless one buys the additional CL8-Controller unit which adds larger volume controls. Perhaps someone can clarify this point?

My Nagra has performed well so far, both in wildlife and music situations. I purchased the heavy duty battery which adds a bit to the weight but gives me over 12 hours of operating time – something important to me as I am often recording far away from the mains.

The weight, at 4.5kg, is quite heavy, and as much as I would want to carry. However, it is not too heavy, and with the supplied padded shoulder strap I have not really found it a problem. In fact, I usually find carrying my reflector and tripod the more burdensome factor.

The supplied padded carrying case is satisfactory, but not ideal. It wraps round the machine and has useful flaps each side to allow the leads in and out. However, like many bags these days, it has Velcro strips to hold things together and a plastic cover over the top controls, which is far from ideal for wildlife situations. There's nothing like the sound of tearing Velcro to set your subject at ease. The arrangement is also not very stable when rested on the ground and tends to fall over.



I have just purchased some waterproof fabric used for computer bags and plan to make myself a padded case with an extra compartment on the front for headphones etc, and a top cover which better protects the knobs, shields the display a little from the sunlight, overlaps the side so rain cannot get in and does not use Velcro.

John Willett found the headphone level a little low. I have found it quite adequate in the field with my Sennheiser HD25's and a level setting not exceeding three quarters of maximum is usually fine.

Editor's note: *The HD25 are a very sensitive and high quality model, being almost too loud with high level sources with a Sound Devices 744T!*

With studio headphones a higher gain setting is needed but for wildlife subjects I have still not needed more than is provided.

The display is described as readable in the sun. This is true to a limit. I found that in strong direct sunlight there is need to shade the display to read it properly, otherwise it is obscured by glare from the glass above it. The ability to control the brightness is useful, especially when recording at night, dawn or dusk.

Machine layout, with all controls on the top, is comfortable. It is possible to assign the microphone level to any of the four front volume controls, and thus to the one next to the rotary on/off/record knob if desired, which can be useful as it allows one's hand to remain close to both these important controls whilst one keeps an eye on the subject.

I have always found it frustrating that portable machines almost invariably have the display or meters on the left hand side. I presume that this is because they are designed for use with the right hand when placed on a flat surface. However, when used over the left shoulder by a right-handed person, the left hand/arm obscures the display when placed on the controls. I wish manufacturers could produce machines in left-hand and right-hand drive versions.

I have not used a Sound Devices recorder so would not wish to compare the Nagra VI with that company's products. However, if one is not put off by the weight and one needs three or four microphone inputs and recording channels in the field, then I believe the Nagra VI is a fine and suitable machine for wildlife recording.

---

## Local Meeting at Leamington Spa, February 2011

### Nick Trotman

As a new "boy" (if you can be at 53!) I was asked to put something together about the local meeting at Roger and Bridget Charters. Simple I thought, cut and paste last years' from the journal – who would remember ... maybe not. So here goes!

I've only been a member for 12 months and have just bought my first digital recorder so it was with some trepidation that I was asked to bring a recording along, especially as everything had decided it was going to stop singing since I'd bought it!!

Imagine my horror when the door was opened, not by Roger Charters as expected but our august Chairman Mr Boughton!! (Yes, *he can have that effect on people!* Ed)

Having been shown the way to the coffee and biscuits I was greeted with some more of the great and the good of the society and another "new boy" so we hid up the corner out of the way.

I didn't make a count but I'm sure there were 13 of us ... maybe there is something magical about sound recording (or is it a dark art?).

Anyway after a short introduction from our Chairman, Roger C (there are a lot of Rogers in this lark aren't there? .....

I'm thinking of changing my name to make it easier) started off with one of his first recordings from 1959 – Stonechat.

I have to say, it was better than mine made with modern equipment so I can only guess at the skill required, or maybe it wasn't so archaic as you might at first think.

After a few more recordings from our Vice Chairman (good to meet you Alan) plus Andy the esteemed editor of the journal (I can creep with the best), it was time for a short break for an excellent lunch. This was provided by the two Rogers' good ladies – Bridget and Margaret, which didn't stem the chat, then back into the lounge.

Onto some final recordings of far flung sounds of India and mouth watering (or should that be ear watering?) recordings of shearwaters from the island of Handa in Sutherland, we finally came to the end.

So was it worth it for a new lad? Most definitely. The knowledge that is held within this society is immense and it was so freely given. I can honestly say I have never been part of such a friendly society, local or national.

One final comment goes to Jenny Beasley, the recording taken of a Blackcap hand held on her Olympus LS11 – I now know what I have to strive for and it is some mark that's for sure!

If you get the chance to go to one of these Jump at it – you will not lose out or regret it.

My only plea – can I have the recipe for the homemade bread and the Aussie dip ??

# Two new members' visit to Burnham Deepdale

## Les and Heather Green

Les and I set off a little apprehensively for the WSRS weekend at Burnham Deepdale. We haven't been members for long, but I had made a few recordings of garden birds, summer visitors in the local forest and a trip to the Farne Islands. We were hoping to learn more about equipment techniques and we were not disappointed.

Les has come away from the weekend with several ideas to work on. We found everyone very friendly and willing to share their expertise.



*The view from Burnham Deepdale*

It was interesting to go out early to record the dawn chorus at Titchwell Marsh RSPB reserve. Without the background noise of vehicles and people, the atmosphere was completely different from later on in the day after being the first customers at the RSPB coffee shop.

As keen wildlife-watchers, it was good to see so many coastal birds. It was exciting to visit Snettisham RSPB at high tide to watch the flocks of waders which from time to time would rise up and swirl dramatically in the sky. The sounds and patterns of the Brent geese as they made their way across the marshes near the hostel in the evening were amazing. Other highlights for us – the sight of a Barn owl hunting, hares on the rich brown ploughed fields and a female Hen harrier quartering.

All in all it was an enjoyable and useful weekend. Having met some knowledgeable and friendly people it has been interesting dipping into the few journals we have and reading their articles (also looking at the earlier journals which are now available on the WSRS web-site).

The accommodation was warm, with hot showers, much appreciated after being out in the cold for several hours. We learned things positive and negative about our equipment, that the early bird is caught by the recordist and the biggest thing of all is patience!



*Some of the group admiring the "Telstar" satellite dish*



*Take aim.....ready....fire!*





# Notes from the North

## Saxicola

What a winter, one just could not ask for better. Lots of snow, lots of ice, lots of berries on the bushes and lots of volcanic activity with its associated ash. The resultant being many less planes in the sky, in fact, on some days none, and visiting birds were chasing food. Brilliant.

Those of you who are fortunate to live in the South must have jumped at the chance to go out and record some wildlife. I look forward to hearing all those memorable recordings made when the skies went quiet. Just some simple soundscapes would do to show that you lot down South can, at least, record something!

Helping pull out visitors (tourists) from the couple of inches of snow they had become stuck in with their Southern 4x4's, was another past time over that period. The old Land Rover was much appreciated and I do hope it puts them off coming again, as they are a bit of a nuisance.

A problem that I noticed while I was out playing with cars and later when I was sledging with the grandchildren; where were all the Redwing? Fieldfares yes, even Waxwings, but many less Redwing than usual. Was it the same down South? Was it the ash cloud? Geese were good; many more over this side this year because it was really, really cold in the East of Scotland, intensely cold for weeks on end. Bet the sledging was good though.

All of a sudden the weather has turned warmer, and now I am worried if I will miss the frogs. I must try to get out this weekend; everything is ready, all being planned for weeks, so I must not miss the opportunity.

I am taking advice from a good sound recording friend of mine, to get focused on a particular subject and plan your recording year accordingly. I think it is good advice, and I am sure in the next year or two. I will get it together, but it will take a year or two.

It's good to see the WSRS are trying to involve young people in the enjoyment of wildlife sound recording. Just getting young people to listen to the sounds of nature is a good thing, especially as it means they have to be in the open air away from computer games and all those other modern distractions. I look forward to hearing and reading about how they get on and how they use the sounds.

Well I am off to see if those frogs have awakened from their slumbers. I hope you will have managed to record them as well.

By the way, it's horrible up here, you wouldn't like it at all, lots and lots of rain and it always blows a gale, honestly. Please keep away to avoid disappointment!!

Regards Saxicola

# Letter from Utopia

## Tony Baylis

In my last letter from Utopia I alluded to the end of the nearly decade long drought that has affected Australia. As I write this letter in mid January Brisbane is experiencing flood levels that are almost equal to the 1974 event.

You will no doubt have seen or heard news of this catastrophe that has befallen not only Brisbane but many other areas in Queensland. Whether this event, caused some say by the La Nina weather system, is indeed the end of the drought only time will tell. It does however illustrate the Boom or Bust nature of much of the Australian continent.

What effect this will have on wildlife is unknown to me. We have, however, been warned that as the floodwaters subside it will create ideal breeding conditions for mosquitoes, sandflies and black fly. These little pests are irritating at the best of times so it is with some trepidation we await the outcome.

The rainfall here in Utopia through December till mid January has been very heavy, with some thirty four inches falling, almost an average annual total. This has caused some inconvenience, with our roads being ad-

versely affected, and no immediate prospect of fixing them. The ground is completely sodden with sheets of standing water over any areas of level ground. Dams and creeks are overflowing.



**Striped Marsh Frog**



The frogs are delighted I expect. We have had some wonderful chorusing from them around the house at night. Several species had a mass spawning in the plunge pool. Unfortunately heavy rain continued and the spawn was flushed out of the overflowing pool onto the ground. I collected it by the bucketful and transported it to one of the dams. The sensation of spawn oozing between my toes as I collected it was novel!

Some distance from the house I could hear calling from Great Barred Frog *Mixophyes fasciolatus*, a large burrowing frog. As so far I have only seen one individual while digging in the veggie patch I was pleased to make a recording of them, they were calling from under the Lantana thickets.

The waterlogged ground has caused a number of trees to fall over, mainly wattles, fast growing pioneer species. I was disappointed that a favourite large bloodwood tree (eucalypt), succumbed, falling close to our guest accommodation where it was quite a feature. This tree was always a good prospect for recording opportunities, especially when in flower.



**Great Barred Frog**

Just recently I made a good recording of Australian Magpies *Gymnorhina tibicen* as they carolled from it. Their songs are one of the iconic Australian bird sounds in my opinion.



**Magpie**

Although they are common birds almost everywhere, with several separable races, I had not previously got a good recording of them here at Utopia.

As I noted in my last letter my friend Graham Smith arrived from the UK during our spring. We headed out West to the Birdsville area with Goyder's Lagoon being our objective. Unfortunately for the third time during 2010 our effort was frustrated by rain making the track impassable. The weather was so inclement that we were driven out of the desert area completely. We were not even able to stop at Eyre Creek, Cuttaburra Crossing, due to heavy mud and further rain. With the roads being closed behind us we made our way to the central highlands.

We stopped a couple of nights at Nogoia, Salvador Rosa, part of the Carnarvon ranges. A pleasant camp was made close to a creek which was swollen with runoff. We were delighted to get close observations of Black Bittern *Ixobrychus flavicollis*. As we stood by a deep pool observing one individual some 20 metres away, our attention was drawn to a movement in the water right in front of us. Here another individual was completely submerged except for its head and beak which was pointed straight up. This individual submerged and again only broke the surface with its head and beak, assuming the same posture.

We kicked ourselves for not having our cameras on us, the bird made off while I hurried back to our nearby camp to grab one. We had more distant views of them the next day; unfortunately no sound was heard that could be attributed to them. Graham was chuffed as on a previous visit to India even the local bird guide had failed to find them for him.

We moved on to the spectacular Canarvon Gorge for a few more nights. This gorge is justifiably popular with magnificent rock formations, sheer rock walls and fascinating aboriginal art. The technique known as stencilling was used extensively here, with a double hand motif unique to this area. Other motifs include boomerangs and Emu footprints.



We noticed a surveillance camera as we left one of the art sites; on enquiring about it we were saddened to hear that even now people deface such sites. Wildlife viewing was good here with dawn and dusk views in the creek of Duck-billed Platypus *Ornithorhynchus anatinus*.



An inquisitive Pied Currawong *Strepera graculina* joined us for lunch and there was a spot of boxing from the Eastern Grey Kangaroos *Macropus giganteus* one morning.



**Pied Currawong**

At the last AGM of the Australian Wildlife Sound Recording Group I was elected as secretary/treasurer. The Aussie group is not as large as the WSRS but has an active membership. The AWSRG holds a workshop every other year and this year it will be held in Western Australia. Any WSRS members who are thinking of taking a holiday down under this year might like to incorporate it into their itinerary. In fact anyone thinking of taking a holiday at any time to Australia or has an interest in Australian wildlife should consider membership of the AWSRG.



**Carnarvon**

The 2011 workshop will be held at the Wellington Forest Lodge and Conference Centre, which is about two hours South of Perth, from the 18<sup>th</sup> to 23<sup>rd</sup> September. That said I am always pleased to hear from any WSRS member who is considering a trip down under at any time.

Hooroo from a Pom out in Woop Woop.



**Photographs by the author**

## Silent May

**Philip Radford**

In a letter to Daines Barrington in 1774, Gilbert White (1788), then aged 54 wrote:

*"Frequent returns of deafness incommode me sadly .... for, when these fits are upon me, I lose all the pleasing notices and little intimations arising from rural sounds; and May is to me as silent and mute with respect to the notes of birds, etc., as August."*

Just why the author's deafness was so intermittent is mysterious although, possibly, there was some link with his severe attacks of coach or travel sickness. Of course, for the field naturalist or wildlife sound-recordist, the prospect of May devoid of bird song is a terrifying thought although, these days, the deaf can use electronic headng-aids.

Such aids are of help but, in reality, nothing can compare with good natural hearing; no doubt, Gilbert White would have had benefit from an electronic aid, but I think he had to be content with a simple ear-trumpet.

### REFERENCE:

WHITE, G. 1788.  
The Natural History and Antiquities of Selborne. London.

# Web-site Developments

## Alan Burbidge

Flicking through past editions of this Journal reveals a whole host of useful articles and reports. Many, but not all, that relate to equipment are very much out of date (bias, tape speed, and squeaky pinch rollers might not mean anything to the new generation of recordists) but articles on field craft, travelogues and recording techniques still retain pertinent detail.

I have made PDF's of scanned copies of all issues of Wildlife Sound from 1968 until the first digital edition. I hope that we will shortly be in a position to upload them to the web-site. The next task after that is to make the indexes of the Journals searchable so that our archive can be interrogated for topic specific articles.

The latest addition to the web-site is 'Sound of the Month'. At the moment there is just one recording per month but it would be great to change this and include a selection of recordings for each month. If you do have a recording or two of any of the featured species, perhaps you could send them to me for inclusion on the web-site.

The species for the next 12 months are: January - Red Fox, February - Barnacle Goose, March - Blackbird, April - Great Tit, May - Marsh Frog, June - Swallow, July - Nightjar, August - Orthoptera, September (to be decided), October - Red Deer, November - Robin, December - Grey seal

I'm always grateful for ideas of new items to add value to the web-site or offers of help. I would like to thank Ian Brady for continuing to cast an eye over the web-site and to Nick Dando for moderating our forum.

Finally if you haven't looked at the blog Page please do. New blog post are always very, very welcome from existing bloggers and new contributors.

It would be great to make the Blog Page interactive so that comments to be lodged with the blog posts but for this we would need a volunteer to moderate the blog page. Any offers?

<http://www.wildlife-sound.org/members>

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# Top 20 Recording Sites in East Anglia

## Bob Reed

As part of the agenda at the recent East Anglian WSRs members meeting held in November 2010, we compiled a list of sites in Norfolk, Suffolk, Essex, Cambridgeshire and Bedfordshire where members believed it would be possible to make good wildlife sound recordings. No doubt some of the experienced and knowledgeable members will throw up their hands in horror because a good number of these sites will be affected by some kind of extraneous noise.

In our region this has become a fact of life and either has to be tolerated or a strategy employed to reduce the effect e.g. 3.00am on a Sunday morning! The more we got in to making the list the greater the possibilities became and a quick look using the Internet will reveal many other sites available through the county Wildlife Trust lists.

We would hope that this list will encourage members to make more recordings locally, some of us gain a lot of satisfaction from recording in our 'local patch' and for many of us with increased fuel prices, this has become much more of a realistic option. There are a relatively large number of members living in the East Anglian region and there is no reason why a number of them could not get together to visit a recording site jointly and share fuel costs.

Below are the names and locations of sites we have listed, if a visit is intended in is obviously important to do some background research and courtesy would require contact with the warden or staff in advance especially if an 'out of hours' visit is proposed. Safe and secure car parking is also an obvious consideration and people on site are obviously in the best position to advise on this.

1. Wicken Fen. Cambridgeshire. CB7 5XP. National Trust. Winter for wildfowl on the mere, Spring for warblers and migrants.
2. Fowlmere RSPB. Cambridgeshire. TL406461. Good general recording venue throughout the year, wet woodland and lakes.
3. Cley Marshes. Norfolk. NB25 7SA. TG054441. Coastal recording, reed beds and wetland, Winter wildfowl and Spring migrants.
4. Waresley Woods. Bedfordshire Wildlife Trust. TL258549. General woodland recording.
5. Snettisham RSPB. Norfolk. TF650328. Wildfowl and waders in Winter. Essential to time visit with high tides.
6. Titchwell RSPB. TF750438. Coastal reserve with fresh water and brackish lagoons. Public footpath access outside of reserve hours.
7. Lackford Lakes. Suffolk Wildlife Trust. TL799706. Wildfowl and the possibility of Stone Curlew.
8. Weeting Heath. Norfolk Naturalists Trust. IP26 4NQ. Stone Curlew.
9. Mayday Farm. TL795835. Woodlark and Nightjar as well as other Breck land species.
10. Minsmere and Walberswick. RSPB. TM473672. Coastal heathland, reed beds and wetland. Good general recording at all seasons.
11. Woodwalton Fen. PE26 2RS. Wet woodland and managed fen. Spring migrants.
12. Fulbourn Fen. TL526 557. General recording.
13. Fen Drayton Pits. RSPB. TL353680. Waterfowl and general species.
14. Welney/Ouse Washes. Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust. PE14 9TN. Wintering wildfowl especially swans and ducks.
15. Dersingham Bog. NNR. North Norfolk. Lowland Heath with a wide variety of species including raptors.
16. Kingfisher Bridge. Situated between Wicken and Stretham on the Cambridgeshire Fens. CB7 5XL. Newly created reserve with lakes and surrounding habitat.
17. Harwich, Mistley and Copperas Woods. Suffolk Wildlife Trust. Woodland bordering on the Stour Estuary. Mix of waders, waterfowl and woodland species.
18. Alton Water. Anglian Water. IP9 2RY. Large lakes part of which are designated nature reserve.
19. Fingringhoe Wick. Essex Wildlife Trust. TM048 193. Naturalised gravel pit area bordering the River Colne. Nightingales, wide variety of scrub and migrant species, good access to wader and wildfowl recording in Winter.
20. Bradfield Woods. Suffolk Naturalist Trust. TL935581. Managed coppice woodland with associated species.

# W.S.R.S. Competition 2010

Compiled by Kyle Turner

## Class 1 – INDIVIDUAL

First:	'Tengmalm's Owl Before Dawn' .....	Bernd Eggert
Second:	'Thrush Nightingale' .....	Geoff Sample
First Restricted:	'Raven' .....	Terry Barnatt
Second Restricted:	'Dance' (American Woodcock) .....	Harry J. Lehto

## Class 2 – SPECIES

First:	'Little Grebe Copulation' .....	Simon Elliott
Second:	'Dancing Black Grouse' .....	Bernd Eggert
First Restricted:	'Shetland Starlings – Family Life' .....	Geoff Sample
Second Restricted:	'Susi' .....	Harry J. Lehto

## Class 3 – COMBINATION

First:	'Redstart and Willow Warbler' .....	Simon Elliott
Second:	'Beaver, Loon and Luck' .....	André Boucher
First Restricted:	'Wood' .....	Philippe Vuillaume
Second Restricted:	'Orthopteran Chorus at Nightfall' .....	Geoff Sample

## Class 4 – HABITAT

First:	'Midnight on the Fjells' .....	Hannu Jännes
Second:	'Highland Rivermouth in Spring' .....	Geoff Sample
First Restricted:	'Good Morning Hawes Water' .....	Brian Harrison
Second Restricted:	'Biodiversity at Neusiedler See' .....	Patrick Franke

## Class 5 – CREATIVE

First:	'Monkey Business' .....	John Paterson
Second:	'Roe Deer in Raindale' .....	Allan Haighton

**NON-AVIAN AWARD**

‘Susi’ ..... Harry J. Lehto

**BOUGHTON FIELDCRAFT AWARD**

‘Woodchat Shrike’ ..... Dave Williams

**OVERALL RESTRICTED WINNER**

‘Shetland Starlings’ ..... Geoff Sample

**SILVER FOX AWARD for OVERALL WINNER**

‘Midnight on the Fjells’ ..... Hannu Jännes

=====

## Members' Adverts

**Sennheiser MKH 416P48.** A pair of new and unused phantom powered short gun mics. Very quiet and damp resistant as you'd expect from an RF polarised mic. Complete with hard plastic storage cases, foam windshields & stand clip. List price in 2010 was £1233 each. Would prefer to sell as a pair for £1150, or £600 each.

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Details at: [www.canford.co.uk/ProductResources/ig/2504.pdf](http://www.canford.co.uk/ProductResources/ig/2504.pdf) (Canford 20-272)

**Canford Stereo Battery Phantom Power Supply.** Runs on a single PP3 battery or 9-16V external input. Bass cut filter, inputs and outputs on XLR's. In very good condition and complete with genuine Canford mains adaptor to run the unit on 240V AC. Current price £131 plus adaptor. Bargain at £75 ono.

Details at: [Canford 20-752](http://Canford 20-752)

Contact Andy Freeth on 07973 318476, or 0121 313 3312 E-mail [Journal@talktalk.net](mailto:Journal@talktalk.net)

## WSRS Sales

The Society has negotiated significant discounts from many suppliers of professional equipment.

Please contact Robert Malpas (see page 2) before your next purchase.



# Notes from the Wildlife Section

## British Library Sound Archive

### Cheryl Tipp, Curator

Over the past few months, many interesting requests for sounds have come into the Wildlife Section. Below are just some of the highlights.

The Virginia Museum of Natural History:  
[www.vmnh.net](http://www.vmnh.net)

requested recordings of the Mountain Reedbuck and Spotted Hyena for a permanent exhibit they were developing on African Wildlife. Both species were recorded by David Watts in South Africa during the early 1980's and are part of an extensive collection of wildlife and habitat recordings from this recordist.

The Education Department of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra also requested a selection of bird calls for inclusion in their set of teaching aids. The company produces a set of educational resources for students and teachers in kindergarten through third grade that are freely available across the Chicago metropolitan area.

The Orchestra Explorers programme introduces these students to the world of music and the musicians of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, while connecting with other core academic areas outside the Arts. Beethoven's Symphony No. 6 was selected for the 2010/2011 Orchestra Explorers kit and, as many of you will know, the second movement includes the composer's musical representation of a Cuckoo, Quail and Nightingale.

Sound recordings of these three species were provided so that students could make comparisons between the music and the real thing.

Wildlife recordings were also used in another learning project currently being developed by Sound and Music  
[www.soundandmusic.org](http://www.soundandmusic.org)

the UK's leading organisation for contemporary and experimental music. 'Minute of Listening' will enable pupils and teachers to engage in a minute of focused listening per day.

The content will range across the whole gamut of music and sound and already includes text, field recordings, found sounds, music, electronic compositions and a variety of other genres. The main aims of the project are to showcase the diversity of music and sound, support academic agendas in speaking and listening, and generally improve concentration levels in classrooms.

PhD student, Holly Root-Gutteridge, from Nottingham Trent University requested 22 wolf recordings from the collection. Holly is trying to establish a method of identifying wolves by their howls using discriminant function analysis. Then she will construct a database of howls in



order to look at individual differences as well as differences between subspecies, species and families.

Science Communication Student, Rachel Mundy, from Royal Holloway University decided to produce a radio programme on bird song for her final year project and obtained several examples from the archive.

Recordings of the Nightingale, Zebra Finch, White-crowned Sparrow, Skylark and Robin were selected for the programme and will hopefully add some interesting elements to her production.

Researchers from overseas have also made use of material archived at the British Library. Kiragu Mwangi from Bird Life International requested an example of the Sokoke Pipit song for planned playback surveys in Tanzania's Zaraninge Forest, while recordings of Hume's Owl were sent to the ecology staff based in Egypt's St Katherine Protectorate.

**Cheryl Tipp**

### Dawn Chorus 16th Century

**Philip Radford**

It seems that the dawn chorus had its admirers in the 16th Century, as shown by these lines of Edmund Spenser:

*"The merry Larke hir mattins sings aloft,  
 The Thrush replies, the Mauds descant playes,  
 The ouzel shrills, the Ruddock warbles soft,  
 So goodly all agree with sweet content,  
 To this dayes merriment."*

Clearly, Society members are not alone in appreciation of the dawn chorus, although I suspect that most of us think of using a sound-recording machine these days rather than composing a poem!

I know that some readers will want to correct Spenser by making the Sky Lark *Alauda arvensis* male, but I think he did well in including so many other species, presumably Mistle Thrush *Turdus viscivorus*, Song Thrush *T. philomelos*, Blackbird *T. merula* and Robin *Erithacus rubecula*.

Poets love to dream; in this world, could people, let alone birds, ever agree in "sweet content" and "merriment"? Obviously, I am no poet!

# AGM and Members' Day Sat July 9th 2011

## ***STOP PRESS.....***

### STEPHEN MOSS TO ADDRESS WILDLIFE SOUND RECORDISTS!!

As Paul has reminded us in his report ( see Page 5), the biggest event in the Society's calendar will soon be here. This is a great opportunity for members to make their ideas and opinions known to the officers, so that the WSRS can be made better for you, the membership.

The meeting will be held at Minsterworth Village Hall in Gloucestershire. There are many places of interest to visit nearby, so why not make a weekend of it? The village hall will be providing limited camping and caravan facilities at the site for a small charge, more details available from Paul.

For lunchtime, there are two pubs near the hall, one about ½ mile towards Gloucester, the "Apple Tree" and the other the "Severn Bore" about a mile the other side. The "Severn Bore" offers basic pub grub, while the "Apple Tree" looks to be a bit more "up market". The "Severn Bore" has a patio area next to the river, lovely on a sunny day.

In order to encourage new faces on the day, (we were all AGM newbies once remember!) the location of the meeting will move every year, so hopefully this July we will get some new members visiting from Wales and the South West.

Although there is an obvious element of formality with any AGM, the emphasis is on the Members' day aspect, with several activities planned.

There was a splendid uptake in the Society's 2010 competition, so a highlight of the afternoon will be a playback session of the winning recordings.

We usually have a guest speaker, this year is no exception. I'm really pleased to report that Paul has asked Stephen Moss, a Producer from the BBC Natural History Unit in Bristol to come and enlighten us in the art of making some of the best Natural History programmes.

You will recognise some of Stephen's productions, including *Birds Britannia* and *Springwatch Easter Special*.

Stephen has worked extensively with well known faces such as Bill Oddie and Simon King; as well as one of the Society's members, Sound Recordist Chris Watson.

I think I can safely say that his presentation will be informative and entertaining, most definitely a must for anyone with an interest in Natural History output and wildlife sound.

Make sure you don't miss this rare opportunity!

The Environment Blog in the Guardian newspaper gives some background on Stephen, which I'm sure will create a raft of questions for him to answer at the Member's Day.

Guardian Item:

[www.guardian.co.uk/environment/blog+profile/stephen+moss1](http://www.guardian.co.uk/environment/blog+profile/stephen+moss1)

BBC Nature Blog:

[www.bbc.co.uk/blogs/natureuk/stephen\\_moss/](http://www.bbc.co.uk/blogs/natureuk/stephen_moss/)

## Membership News

As you will probably recall, new members and address changes have been located in the Journal. From this edition on, the membership news will now appear in the quarterly newsletters from Paul. This will have the immediate advantage of membership being more regularly updated than in the Journal.

Also, the address details will only be available to members who receive the newsletters, rather than anyone who views an edition of the Journal.

**Andy**

### **Blackcap Song: An 18th Century Description**

**Philip Radford**

In a letter addressed to Thomas Pennant, Gilbert White (1788) gives a lyrical description of the spring song of the Blackcap *Sylvia atricapilla*:

*"The black-cap has in common a full, sweet, deep, loud and wild pipe; yet that strain is of short continuance, and his motions are desultory; but when the bird sits calmly and engages in song in earnest, he pours forth very sweet, but inward melody, and expresses great variety of soft and gentle modulations, superior perhaps to those of any of our warblers, the nightingale excepted".*

This passage could not have been written unless the author had had considerable experience of listening to Blackcap song, and had carefully studied variations between different individuals. Are today's nature writers any more capable of describing bird song?

**Reference:**

WHITE, G. 1788.  
The Natural History and Antiquities of Selborne. London.

## INSTRUCTIONS FOR AUTHORS

Copy dates are 1<sup>st</sup> August (Autumn edition) and 1<sup>st</sup> February (Spring edition).

**Text:** submission of manuscripts in electronic form, via e-mail, is preferred.  
All common document formats can be handled, but ideally Microsoft Word DOC or RTF in Arial font.

Please don't add any additional formatting e.g. **bold**, *italics*, underline, line indents etc. unless necessary, as this has to be removed before the text is edited.

Typed manuscripts are also acceptable, but as above, please avoid additional formatting or underlining as this can make them difficult to scan.

Hand-written manuscripts will be accepted only for contributions of less than 150 words.

**Illustrations:** Digital images (on CD or via e-mail) are preferred. Digital images should be in TIFF format or JPG with a print resolution of at least 300 dpi. Please don't embed digital images in your text document – they must be sent separately. Prints or transparencies are acceptable.  
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## In the Autumn Journal

**CD & Book reviews**

**Equipment reviews**

**Buzzards overhead**

**Multi-capsule microphones**



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# Wildlife Recording with DPA Microphones



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